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CHARACTERISTICS OF CARLYLE

CARLYLE

AS SEEN IN HIS WORKS:

HIS CHARACTERISTICS AS A WRITER AND AS A MAN

BY

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PREFACE.

THE following pages were written as an answer to the question, What are the characteristic features which distinguish Carlyle as a Writer and as a Man? They were written mainly with that object. Some critical notes are added on his peculiar opinions on certain social, political, and religious questions, on the estimate to be formed of him as a historian and as a general writer, and, lastly, on his peculiar style of expression, as seen more particularly in his later writings. The utmost care has been taken to make this view of Carlyle fair and impartial, to estimate at their true value the great qualities which distinguished him, whether as a writer or as a man, while

not forgetting or concealing those points where he appears to fall far short of perfection. The views expressed were suggested chiefly by Carlyle's own writings, and are the result of their perusal; but at the same time much has been learned from Mr Froude, who, in his interesting *Life of Carlyle*, has afforded light and guidance on several important particulars, as is gratefully acknowledged elsewhere.

The extracts given from Carlyle's works, especially in the chapters that treat of him as a critic and a humorist, will prove interesting in themselves, and they may also serve the further purpose of illustrating his impressive manner of writing on subjects that he understood well and on which he could speak without prejudice.

This Essay may, it is hoped, be of some use in furnishing hints to the reader who is beginning to study Carlyle's works. It may also serve to give some definite idea of Carlyle as

an author to those who have not sufficient time or opportunity to peruse his voluminous writings for themselves. Nothing would have been easier than to have added considerably to the size of the book by discussing some of the questions raised at greater length and adding new ones which have not been alluded to. Much has been purposely omitted, in order not to interfere with the main design, which was to touch lightly upon salient points and prominent features, to exhibit a general outline rather than a complete picture.

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CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CARLYLE AS A HISTORIAN.

CHAPTER I.

HIS IDEAL OF HISTORY—GOD'S MORAL GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD.

ONE of the leading features of Carlyle as a historian is seen in his constant recognition of God's overruling providence in the affairs of men. He sees God in History. According to Carlyle, he ~~was~~ no historian at all who ~~did not~~ recognise this fact. It is in these words he describes his conception of History:—

"All History is an inarticulate Bible; and in a dim intricate manner reveals the Divine Appearances in this lower world. For God did make this world, and does for ever govern it; the loud-roaring Loom of Time, with all its French revolutions, Jewish revelations 'weaves the vesture thou seest Him by.' There is no Biography of a man, much less any History, or Biography of a Nation, but wraps in it a message out of Heaven, addressed to the hearing ear or to the not hearing."

This leading idea, which Carlyle held so firmly in theory, he also illustrates in practice in the actual historical works that came from his pen. The great lesson taught in his *French Revolution* is that God rules over all, avenging the neglect of duty on governments and peoples. Some of the chapters remind one of the chorus of a Greek play, where Destiny is seen presiding over all, and man is carried along by a current which he cannot control. The same lesson is taught with equal emphasis in his *Cromwell*, where the great captain is represented as fighting on the side of truth and justice and ascribing to God all the glory of his victories. So thoroughly, in Carlyle's view, was Cromwell imbued with a sense of God's overruling providence in all events, great and small, on this earth, that, adopting the expression of a German writer, he calls him a "God-intoxicated man." With reference to one of his speeches, he thus apostrophises Cromwell:—"Beautiful great soul, to whom the Temporal is all irradiated with the Eternal, and God is everywhere divinely visible in the affairs of men."

The same truth, though perhaps in fainter colours, is set forth in his *Frederick*, where victory is still seen inclining to the side of truth and justice, in opposition to shams and unrealities, and nations are found prospering, in

the long run, according as they cultivate those virtues which are in harmony with the great moral laws on which the world is constituted. Of Frederick, after the battle of Molwitz, Carlyle says:—

"Slumberous Europe, rotting amid its blind pedantries, its lazy hypocrisies, conscious and unconscious: this man is capable of shaking it a little out of its stupid refuges of lies, and ignominious wrappages and bed clothes, which will be its grave clothes otherwise; and of intimating to it afar off, that there is still a Veracity in things, and a Mendacity in Sham Things."

Impressed so deeply with the belief that it is the first duty of the historian to set forth and illustrate God's moral government in the affairs of nations, Carlyle has little respect for those writers who shut their eyes to this great fact, and look at history as a chain of events connected merely by human causes. Such a writer was Voltaire, and of him he observes—"To him History is not a mighty drama, enacted on the theatre of infinitude, with Suns for lamps, and Eternity for a background."

The following extracts may serve to illustrate still further Carlyle's view of the lessons to be learnt from history. Speaking of the eighteenth century, and of the French Revolution in which it expired, he says:—

"To me the Eighteenth Century has nothing grand

in it, except that grand universal Suicide, named French Revolution, by which it terminated its otherwise most worthless existence with at least one worthy act;—setting fire to its old home and self; and going up in flames and explosions, in a truly memorable and important manner. A very fit termination, as I thankfully feel, for such a century. . . . For there was need once more of a Divine Revelation to the torpid, frivolous children of men, if they were not to sink altogether into the ape condition. And in that whirlwind of the Universe,—lights obliterated, and the torn wrecks of Earth and Hell hurled aloft into the Empyrean; black whirlwind, which made even apes serious, and drove most of them mad,—there was, to men, a voice audible; voice from the heart of things once more, as if to say: 'Lying is not permitted in this Universe. The wages of lying, you behold, are death. Lying means damnation in this Universe; and Beelzebub, never so elaborately dressed in crowns and mitres, is *not* God.' This was a revelation truly to be named of the Eternal, in our poor Eighteenth Century; and has greatly altered the complexion of said Century to the Historian ever since."

While admitting that there were many things in Frederick called the Great that one could have wished not there, though he was but a questionable hero, yet Carlyle discovers that he was a reality, that he always means what he speaks, and is no hypocrite or phantasm, adding—

"We perceive this man was far indeed from trying to deal swindler-like with the facts around him; that he

honestly recognised said facts wherever they disclosed themselves, and was very anxious also to ascertain their existence where still hidden or dubious. For he knew well, to a quite uncommon degree, and with a merit all the higher as it was an unconscious one, how entirely inexorable is the nature of facts, whether recognised or not, ascertained or not; how vain all cunning of diplomacy, management and sophistry, to save any mortal who does *not* stand on the truth of things, from sinking, in the long-run. Sinking to the very Mudgods, with all his diplomacies, possessions, achievements; and becoming an unnameable object, hidden deep in the Cesspools of the Universe. This I hope to make manifest; this which I long ago discerned for myself, with pleasure, in the physiognomy of Friedrich and his life. Which indeed was the first real sanction, and has all along been my inducement and encouragement, to study his life and him. How this man, officially a King withal, comported himself in the Eighteenth Century, and managed *not* to be a Liar and Charlatan as his Century was, deserves to be seen a little by men and Kings, and may silently have didactic meanings in it."

CHAPTER II.

HISTORICAL ACCURACY—ACCUMULATION OF FACTS.

ANOTHER characteristic feature seen in Carlyle as a historian is his scrupulous accuracy. This is a merit of which no one can rob him. He studies his subject carefully, reads all that has previously been written upon it, verifies every detail by examining original documents, leaving no stone unturned to acquaint himself with all the facts and get at the exact truth. This careful accuracy extends in every direction. He spares no pains to ascertain the exact date of any important event, sometimes spending days in the search, so as to determine it once for all and place it beyond the possibility of doubt for all future time. We find the same minute accuracy in regard to the purity of the text in the books from which he quotes, and as to the exact words used on any particular occasion.

This genuine accuracy, combined with minute research, is seen in all Carlyle's historical works. In all of them it is a striking and conspicuous feature. In his *Cromwell*, for example, he is at

the greatest pains to discover every scrap of authentic information bearing on his subject, and especially every authentic utterance anywhere to be found of the man Cromwell himself. His painstaking care in this respect is above all praise. Then he is minutely accurate in his description of the places where Cromwell lived in his early years, and of the battlefields where he afterwards fought and conquered. We see also with what accuracy he corrects mistakes, fixes dates, purifies the text; and how he picks up every thread, omitting nothing that can throw light on the great man whose life and character he has undertaken to delineate. As an illustration of his scrupulous accuracy even in minor matters, it may be observed that in the original document, written by Cromwell himself, describing "Preston Battle," Carlyle finds the river "Ribble" mentioned, instead of the "Hodder," one of its tributaries. This slight error he is careful to correct; and it is only one instance out of many that might be given of his extreme, and what some might consider his overstrained, attention to such minute details.

The same extreme accuracy may be observed in his *French Revolution*, where his extensive reading and minute acquaintance with facts, some of them lying out of the common track, is very conspicuous. And as to his *Frederick*, so accu-

rate is he as to facts of every kind, including among them the exact number, position, and arrangement of the opposing armies in the battles fought in that eventful reign, that the Germans have chosen it for a text-book in their military schools. It may be observed also that he is at great pains, in this *Life of Frederick*, to sweep away the vile calumnies circulated in regard to the private life of his hero, finding them to be without any solid basis of fact. With reference to one of these calumnies he deliberately says :—

"That in these circumstances, and taking into view the otherwise known qualities of this high Fellow-Creature, the present Editor does not, for his own share, value the rumour at a pin's fee. And leaves it, and recommends his readers to leave it, hanging by its own head in the sad subterranean regions."

Along with this accuracy we may notice the great number of facts that Carlyle lays before his readers. His histories are literally crammed with facts, all duly authenticated. We see this characteristic feature in his *French Revolution* and in his *Cromwell*, but in neither is it more conspicuous than in his history of Frederick. Take the following example, describing Kurfürst Frederick William's march against the Swedish army then encamped in Pomerania. It is important that he reach Gilge, where the Swedes

were encamped, a distance of about a hundred miles as the crow flies, in the shortest possible time; and he has to march over rough roads in the dead of winter. Carlyle says:—

"It is ringing frost to-day, and for days back:—Friedrich Wilhelm hastily gathers all the sledges, all the horses of the district; mounts some Four-thousand men in sledges; starts with the speed of light, in that fashion. Scours along all day, and after the intervening bit of land, again along; awakening the ice-bound silences. Gloomy Frische Haf, wrapt in its Winter cloud-coverlids, with its wastes of tumbled sand, its poor frost-bound fishing-hamlets, pine-hillocks,—desolate-looking, stern as Greenland or more so, says Büsching, who travelled there in winter-time,—hears unexpected human noises, and huge grinding and trampling; the Four-thousand, in long fleet of sledges, scouring across it in that manner. All day they rush along,—out of the rimy hazes of morning into the olive-coloured clouds of evening again,—with huge loud-grinding rumble;—and do arrive in time at Gilge."

CHAPTER III.

DOMESTIC INCIDENTS—LUDICROUS ELEMENT—PATHOS.

In Carlyle's historical works we not only read of the public acts, but also get many glimpses into the private and family life of the leading characters. This is seen in his *Cromwell*, where the author is at pains to dwell upon the "domesticities" of Oliver's life, his kindly ways and kindly acts towards members of his own family, as indicated in his private correspondence. Thus, for example, we read of Oliver's desire, long before he rose to eminence as a public man, to make some provision for his little "wench,"—meaning his little daughter. To this little incident Carlyle recurs more than once. Look also, in the *French Revolution*, how he dwells upon kindly acts of a domestic nature, even where done by those for whom he has no great regard. We read that Louis XV. used, in the morning, "when the dogs were uncoupling for the hunt," to take a cup of coffee, prepared by his own hand, with his grown-up daughters. Carlyle notices this kindly act with much satisfaction.

Poor women, says he, destined hereafter to so much sorrow and suffering—

"Be this always an assured place in your remembrance: for the act was good and loving! To us also it is a little sunny spot, in that dismal howling waste, where we hardly find another."

Carlyle is fond of introducing picturesque incidents in his narrative, and if they have a somewhat ludicrous aspect so much the better. Of this kind is that of the musketeer with wooden arm in Cromwell's army, who at the battle of Dunbar fired thrice "not without effect, with his wooden arm." Even amid the terrible scenes of the French Revolution this ludicrous element crops up now and then. Thus at the news of the king's flight from Paris, we see the inhabitants of a certain city at some distance from the capital roused from their sleep at midnight and appearing by the hundred in the open street, "in their shirts and nightcaps." On another occasion we hear of one in great haste taking the road on horseback and galloping furiously "without boots," having no time to draw them on. In the same volume, where Louis XV. is described as lying sick unto death, and the question arises—Shall he or shall he not receive Extreme Unction? Cardinal Richelieu is introduced to the reader in these words:—

"Old Richelieu, when Archbishop of Beaumont,

driven by public opinion, is at last for entering the sickroom,—will twitch him by the *rochet* into a recess, and there, with his old dissipated mastiff-face, and the oiliest vehemence, be seen pleading (and even, as we judge by Beaumont's change of colour, prevailing), 'that the King be not killed by a proposition in Divinity.'"

We can all see not only how graphic this is, but also how Carlyle contrives to mingle the ludicrous with the serious even on the most solemn occasions.

If Carlyle in his historical narratives can sometimes slide into the ludicrous and grotesque, he can also, when occasion offers, show himself a master of pathos. In his *French Revolution* there are many pathetic scenes, mingled with those of a widely different character. The trial and execution of Louis XVI., of the Queen Marie Antoinette, of Madame Roland and Charlotte Corday, are told in a tone of touching tenderness. In his *Cromwell* there is a pathetic account of Oliver's last days, where in addition to the grave tone and simple expression, we find many little facts scattered through other books gathered up and pieced together, which lend a deeply pathetic interest to the scene. As another illustration of this characteristic feature of Carlyle's historical works, where, as is not unusual with our author, it follows close upon

what is light and gay, we may quote the following brief passage from his *Frederick.* With reference to "Kurfürst Friedrich Wilhelm" and his first wife we read :—

"Not but that he had his troubles with his womankind. Even with this his first Wife, whom he loved truly, and who truly loved him, there were scenes; the Lady having a judgment of her own about everything that passed, and the Man being choleric withal. Sometimes, I have heard, 'he would dash his Hat at her feet,' saying symbolically, 'Govern you, then, Madam!' Not the Kurfürst-Hat; a Coif is my wear, it seems! Yet her judgment was good; and he liked to have it on the weightiest things, though her powers of silence might halt now and then. He has been known, on occasion, to run from his Privy Council to her apartment, while a complex matter was debating, to ask her opinion, her's too, before it was decided. Excellent Louisa; Princess full of beautiful piety, good-sense and affection; a touch of the Nassau-Heroic in her. At the moment of her death, it is said, when speech had fled, he felt, from her hand which lay in his, three slight, slight pressures: 'Farewell!' thrice mutely spoken in that manner,—not easy to forget in this world."

CHAPTER IV.

HISTORICAL WORD-PORTRAITS.

ANOTHER characteristic feature of Carlyle's historical style is seen in the great variety of word-portraits with which his pages are enriched. They are often pen-and-ink sketches, drawn with a few rapid strokes. In this way we have, in the chapter headed "Procession" of the *French Revolution*, a gallery of portraits, dashed off roughly, but presenting a vivid picture of the external features, and through them of the character of such men as Mirabeau, Danton, Marat, and others who played a more or less conspicuous part in the exciting events of that period. The following is the portrait drawn of Mirabeau :—

"Towards such work, in such manner marches he, this singular Riquetti Mirabeau. In fiery rough figure, with black Samson-locks under slouch-hat, he steps along there. A fiery fuliginous mass, which could not be choked or smothered but would fill all France with smoke."

Then follows the portrait of Danton :—

"The huge, brawny figure, through whose black brows

and rude flattened face, there looks a waste courage as of Hercules not yet ~~furious~~."

After narrating the terrible scenes in Paris during the Reign of Terror, he thus describes the same Danton :—

"See Danton enter—the black brows clouded, the colossus figure tramping heavy; grim energy looking from all features of the rugged man. Strong is that grim Son of France and Son of Earth; a Reality and not a formula he too."

Of Marat, who afterwards became notorious for his crimes, we have the following portrait, representing him as looking on while the elected deputies forming the procession are passing by :—

"Surely also, in some place not of honour, stands or sprawls-up querulous, that he too, though short, may see—one squalidest bleared mortal, redolent of soot and horse-drugs: Jean Paul Marat of Neuchatel! . . . As thy bleared soul looks forth, through bleared, dull-acrid, wo-stricken face, what sees it in all this?"

Sometimes the portrait is of a more elaborate kind, full length, so to speak, as in this of Frederick the Great of Prussia, as he appeared in the later years of his life :—

"He is a King every inch of him, though without the trappings of a King. Presents himself in a Spartan simplicity of vesture: no crown but an old military cocked-hat,—generally old, or trampled and kneaded

unto absolute softness, if now;—no sceptre but one like Agamemnon's, a walking-stick cut from the woods, which serves as a riding-stick (with which he hits the horse 'between the ears,' say authors);—and for royal robes, a mere soldier's blue coat with red facings, coat likely to be old, and sure to have a good deal of Spanish snuff on the breast of it; rest of the apparel dim, unobtrusive in colour or cut, ending in high over-knee military boots, which may be brushed (and, I hope, kept soft with an underhand suspicion of oil), but are not permitted to be blackened or varnished; Day and Martin with their soot-pots forbidden to approach.

"The man is not of god-like physiognomy, any more than of imposing stature or costume: close-shut mouth with thin lips, prominent jaws and nose, receding brow, by no means of Olympian height; head however, is of long form, and has superlative gray eyes in it. Not what is called a beautiful man; nor yet, by all appearance, what is called a happy. On the contrary, the face bears evidence of many sorrows, as they are termed, of much hard labour done in this world; and seems to anticipate nothing but more still coming. Quiet stoicism, capable enough of what joy there were, but not expecting any worth mention—great unconscious and some conscious pride, well tempered with a cheery mockery of humour, are written on that old face, which carries its chin well forward, in spite of the slight stoop about the neck; snuffy nose, rather flung into the air, under its old cocked-hat,—like an old snuffy lion on the watch; and such a pair of eyes as no man, or lion, or lynx of that Century bore elsewhere, according to all the testimony we have. . . . Most excellent, potent, brilliant eyes, swift-darting as the stars, stedfast as the sun;

gray, we said, of the azure-gray colour; large enough, not of glaring size; the habitual expression of them vigilance and penetrating sense, rapidity resting on depth. Which is an excellent combination, and gives us the notion of a lambent outer radiance, springing from some great inner sea of light and fire in the man. The voice, if he speak to you, is of similar physiognomy: clear, melodious and sonorous; all tones are in it, from that of ingenuous inquiry, graceful sociality, light-flowing banter (rather prickly for most part), up to definite word of command, up to desolating word of rebuke and reprobation."

It may be observed that in this history of Frederick there are other portraits equally realistic, and almost equally interesting with that just given; particularly those of King Frederick William, of the "Old Dessauer," one of the leading military men of that time, and of Frederick William, usually called the "Great Elector." Besides these there will be found in the same book many portraits drawn on a smaller scale, miniature portraits, as it were, but equally remarkable as the larger ones for their truth and reality.

In the historical portraits drawn by such writers as Clarendon, Hume, and Robertson, it is chiefly the moral and intellectual qualities that are delineated, with no reference, or but slight, to the external or physiognomic features. With Carlyle it is different. In his portraits the

bodily features, often those of the face exclusively, stand out most prominently.

Apart from his physiognomic word-portraits, Carlyle exhibits remarkable skill in drawing character, invested with human interest, in another way. In his pages we have no direct portrait or even description of Cromwell, but in the *Letters and Speeches* Oliver is allowed to draw his own portrait; and out of the facts, incidents, and characteristic traits brought forward, a figure rises up before the mind of the reader, if in shadowy outline, yet highly impressive.

CHAPTER V.

STYLE OF EXPRESSION.

In reading Carlyle's historical works you cannot fail to observe here and there a very peculiar style of expression, where the author writes in hot haste, blurting out his meaning in the most natural way, without any regard to what pedantic people may say or think. In these passages he aims at expressing his meaning forcibly—and that is enough. Examples of this free and easy style are met with in profusion in all his historical works. In his *French Revolution*, for example, the commotion caused by the king's flight from Paris is described in this manner. The people are represented as at first "calm, motionless as a couchant lion," with but "a few broolings, some waggings of the tail; to show what it *will* do." But at last "all France is ruffled,—roughened up (metaphorically speaking) into one enormous, desperate-minded, red guggling Turkeycock!" Such is the forcible, but at the same time rough and ready way in which it is Carlyle's humour sometimes to

write, in defiance of all the ordinary strait-laced rules of historical composition.

The same free and easy style is seen in Carlyle's *Cromwell*, where the words not unfrequently have the appearance of being jotted down in the utmost haste, in the manner of rough notes, intended for future use when the author has more leisure for deliberate composition. It is conspicuous, not only in long paragraphs, but likewise in the short pithy comments interspersed here and there in the narrative. Quoting, for instance, from Hodgson's account of Preston battle, where a certain "Major Poundall" is mentioned, Carlyle throws in the correction "Pownel, you pudding-head." In one place Cromwell writes thus to Mr Major (his eldest son's future father-in-law): "My son had a great desire to come down and wait upon your daughter. I perceive he minds that more than to attend to business here." Carlyle's criticism upon this is—"The dog!" The brief comments interspersed here and there among Cromwell's speeches are of this description, pithy and to the point, but very familiar. On one occasion the Protector, addressing the "Long Parliament," urges upon them the necessity of getting on more quickly with their work; upon which Carlyle observes parenthetically, "Old Parliament dubiously rolls its eyes."

Nowhere is Carlyle's rough and ready style more conspicuous than in his history of Frederick. You can hardly open a page of the book without being struck with this peculiarity. Not unfrequently, too, you are struck with the rough metaphor he employs to express his meaning more forcibly; and of this a few examples may be given. In one place he says:—

"If this swift King (comparable to the old Serpent for devices) were to burst forth from his Silesian strengths; tread sharply on the *tail* of Prince Karl's Operation, and bring back the formidably fanged head of *it* out of Alsace, five hundred miles all at once,—there would be a business."

Again he says:—

"To seize Saxony and hobble it with ropes, so that at anytime you could pin it motionless, and even, if need were, milk the substance out of it."

Here is another specimen of his rough and ready metaphorical style:—

"The Teutsch Ritterdom, ever since it got its back broken in that Battle of Tannenberg in 1410, and was driven out of West-Preussen with such ignominious kicks, has been lying bedrid, eating its remaining revenues, or sprawling about in helpless efforts to rise again, which require no notice from us."

Of the members of a certain public board who had neglected their duties, he says in his familiar way,—"For which reason they have been sharply

questioned, and shaken by the collar, so to speak." In this rough, familiar, but at the same time graphic style, one of Frederick's generals is thus described :—

"Solid, strong-boned old coach-horse, who has his own modes of trotting, having done many a heavy mile of it in his time; and whose skin, one hopes, is of the due thickness against undue spurring."

One other example, somewhat more subdued in tone, may be given of Carlyle's familiar historical style of expression, as seen in innumerable instances in his *Frederick*. Referring to "Friedrich Wilhelm's" stay at Hanover, when he was a robust boy of five years old, Carlyle says :—

"He got no improvement in breeding, as we intimated: none at all; fought, on the contrary, with his young cousin (afterwards our George II.), a boy twice his age, though of weaker bone; and gave him a bloody nose. To the scandal and consternation of the French Protestant gentle-women and court-dames in their stiff silks: 'Ahee, your Electoral Highness!' This had been a rough unruly boy from the first discovery of him. At a very early stage, he, one morning while the nurses were dressing him, took to investigating one of his shoe-buckles; would, in spite of remonstrances, slobber it about in his mouth; and at length swallowed it down,—beyond mistake; and the whole world cannot get it up! Whereupon wild wail of nurses; and his 'Mother came screaming,' poor mother:—it is the same small shoe-[illegible] which is still shown, with a ticket

and date to it, '31st December 1692,' in the Berlin *Kunst Kammer:* for it turned out harmless, after all the screaming; and a few grains of rhubarb restored it safely to the light of day; henceforth a thrice-memorable shoe-buckle. Another time, it is recorded, though with less precision of detail, his governess the Dame Montbail having ordered him to do something which was intolerable to the princely mind, the princely mind resisted in a very strange way: the princely body, namely, flung itself suddenly out of a third-story window, nothing but the *hands* left within; and hanging on there by the sill, and fixedly resolute to obey gravitation rather than Montbail, soon brought the poor lady to terms. Upon which, indeed, he had been taken from her, and from the women altogether, as evidently now needing rougher government. Always an unruly fellow, and dangerous to trust among crockery. At Hanover he could do no good in the way of breeding: sage Leibnitz himself, with his big black periwig and large patient nose, could have put no metaphysics into such a boy."

CHAPTER VI.

LENGTHY INTRODUCTIONS—INCIDENTAL ALLUSIONS—PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS.

It remains to notice some other peculiar features of Carlyle's historical style. Among these may be mentioned his habit of indulging in prolonged introductory investigation before entering upon the immediate subject before him. As a rule it is his pleasure to take a wide preliminary survey and to handle various points not strictly connected with his proper theme. You see this in the earlier chapters of the *French Revolution*, as also in some subsequent chapters of the same work where he enters upon new ground. It is the same in his *Cromwell*, where he is far from diving at once *in medias res*. But nowhere is this tendency so conspicuous as in his *Frederick*, where you have to read through the first and a good part of the second volume before getting anything but casual glimpses of the actual hero of the story.

Allied to this is another characteristic feature. Not content with confining himself to the events of the period and the leading characters who

took an active share in them, Carlyle is fond of looking beyond them and introducing to the notice of the reader distinguished persons connected with the narrative only by some casual association of ideas. In this way we learn that at the time when Cromwell was entered a student at Cambridge our Shakespeare was taking his farewell of the world; that when Cromwell was a farmer at St Ives about the same period the great Gustavus fell on the field at Lutzen. In the same way, in his *Frederick*, the author contrives to bring in the great astronomer Kepler, though he was in no way, except in the single article of time, connected with the stirring events passing on the earth at that period, being wholly occupied with his observations on the heavenly bodies.

It may be noticed also that, in his histories, Carlyle indulges freely in abstract speculations and philosophical reflections. Of this we have an example—one out of many—in the following beautiful, if misplaced, passage found in the earlier pages of the *French Revolution*:—

"For truly, as it has been written 'Silence is divine' and of Heaven; so in all earthly things too there is a silence that is better than any speech. Consider it well, the Event, the thing which can be spoken of and recorded, is it not, in all cases, some disruption, some solution of continuity. Were it even a glad Event, it

involves change, involves loss; and so far, either in the past or in the present, is an irregularity, a disease. Stillest perseverance were our blessedness; not dislocation and alteration,—could they be avoided.

"The oak grows silently, in the forest, a thousand years; only in the thousandth year, when the woodman arrives with his axe, is there heard an echoing through the solitudes; and the oak announces itself when, with far-sounding crash, it *falls*. How silent too was the planting of the acorn, scattered from the lap of some wandering wind! Nay, when our oak flowered, or put on its leaves (its glad Events), what shout of proclamation could there be? Hardly from the most observant a word of recognition. These things *befell* not, they were slowly *done;* not in an hour, but through the flight of days: what was to be said of it? This hour seemed altogether as the last was, as the next would be."

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CARLYLE AS A BIOGRAPHER AND CRITIC.

CHAPTER VII.

CHARACTERISTICS AS A BIOGRAPHER—GENERAL REMARKS.

So far in regard to the more prominent features of Carlyle as a historian. Let us now look at him in his character as a biographer and critic. These two subjects, apparently so distinct, are here placed together, because they are closely united in Carlyle's writings, criticism being there intermingled with biography, and biography with criticism. Where the one is, there mostly we find the other also, though not always in the same proportion. In some of the review articles on German authors, as in that on Goethe, the critical element predominates; while in others, as in those on Jean Paul Richter and Novalis, much interesting biographical matter accompanies the criticism on their works. The article on the poet Burns, it need hardly be said, is not

wholly a critique on his poems and songs, valuable as that is, but combines with it an interesting sketch of his life and character. If our author's indignation does now and again boil over rather turbulently, was there not a cause? That such a man should be set to gauge beer barrels in the burgh of Dumfries may well excite the indignation of calmer minds than that of Carlyle. Still less needful is it to point out that the *Lives* of Schiller and John Sterling, while in the main biographical, contain also not a little literary criticism.

Speaking generally, it may be said that the prominent and more excellent qualities that distinguish Carlyle as a historian are equally conspicuous in his biographies. We see the same extreme accuracy as to facts and details of every kind, and the same conscientious study of his subject, so as to get at the exact truth and nothing but the truth. The man he writes about is not dressed up with foreign ornament, but appears in his real aspect,—the same figure, as far as possible, that presented itself to the eyes of those who lived beside him. To this may be added his sympathy with those he writes about, as in the case of Burns and Schiller in particular,—his sympathy with their struggles and sufferings as well as their genius. This both sharpened his insight into their character and gave a glow and

eloquence to his words. It was this quality, even more than his critical acumen, that won for Carlyle the esteem of Goethe, who found in the biographer of Schiller not only proofs of the most careful study of the poet's works, but also deep insight into his character and hearty sympathy with him.

In Carlyle's biographies, I have said, we have distinct traces of that extreme accuracy in regard to dates and facts of every kind that are a marked feature in his histories. Such is his conscientious accuracy, that every event that comes within the sphere of his vision must have its exact date fixed. We may see with what careful accuracy he traces the distinct stages of John Sterling's fruitless wanderings in search of health. When he comes to the last stage he says—this was his fifth change of place,—"It was what I call his fifth peregrinity, his fifth and last." See again, in the same book, with what minute and almost superfluous attention he gives the exact date when John Sterling's infant brothers and sisters died. While he is so strictly accurate in his own statements, with the eye of a hawk he detects errors in others. To give a single example. The venerable Archdeacon Hare inadvertently mentions, in his remarks prefixed to a selection from John Sterling's writings, that a certain lecture was read

to a public audience in 1842. Carlyle is down upon him at once, and points out with scrupulous accuracy that this took place, not in 1842 but in 1841.

One or two traits may be mentioned which distinguish Carlyle from most other biographers, or which at least are found in him in more intensity than in most others. He objects strongly to the plan of writing a biography which would carefully conceal everything that could give offence to anybody. Such a piece of writing, he holds, is no biography, but only the ghost of one. Another characteristic is this, that in writing, whether it be a biography or history, he likes, whenever he can, to see an authentic picture of the individual delineated, were it only a tolerable likeness, believing that in it he has something more definite and certain than can be got from any mere verbal description. It is for this reason that, in his *Frederick*, he values so highly the picture of "The Little Drummer," representing his hero in long clothes, not more than from three to four years old. Of this picture he says:—

"It is one of the very few visualities or definite certainties we can lay hold of in those young years of his, and bring conclusively home to our imagination, out of the waste Prussian dust-loads of uninstructive garrulity which pretend to record them for us."

It may be observed that, whenever it is possible, Carlyle prefers to throw his thoughts into a biographical form. In his *Lectures on Heroes* the old Norse religion assumes a biographical shape in his sketch of Odin. Islam is treated in the same way in his sketch of Mahomet. It is the same in the other lectures, where the subject is treated, not philosophically or critically but biographically, the individual who is the chief representative of the system under review supplying a centre of interest round which the facts, ideas, and arguments naturally range themselves. Even Carlyle's historical works show the same tendency. Of his *Cromwell* it would be hard to say whether it is more a history or a biography. Mingled with the narrative of national events, we have many side glances into the private and family life of Oliver, into those "domesticities" which render him interesting in his private character as a man. In like manner the *French Revolution* is dotted with little biographical pieces. The history of Frederick, too, is in a great measure biographical. Through whole pages it is a gossiping biography of individuals, where the really national events are for the time lost sight of. It need hardly be added that the most interesting portion of *Past and Present* is biographical; while *Sartor Resartus* is expressly and in name an autobiography.

If Carlyle had a predilection for biographical composition, so also he excelled in it. In reading his works you will find, more and more, that he is most interesting in his biographical sketches. Thus, in his *Past and Present*, nothing can well be more interesting or more useful reading than his sketch of "Abbot Samson," who is seen acting his part in the station where he was placed with indomitable energy and honesty of purpose. By the addition of fact to fact, by gathering together a number of little incidents, each in itself of little moment, the author contrives to build up and present to our view a figure of extraordinary interest; while at the same time we are incidentally supplied with a vivid picture of a state of society and manners which once existed but has long since passed away. When we proceed to the later chapters of the book, filled as they are with discussions on social and political questions, we feel that here the author is less at home.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARACTERISTICS AS A CRITIC—GENERAL REMARKS—EXAMPLES.

To these observations on Carlyle as a biographer or life-writer must be added a few words on his special character as a critic. Considered as a literary critic Carlyle holds a very high place. If in his views of men and institutions he is frequently at fault, the same cannot be said of his literary criticisms, which are generally sound and faultless. Nowhere will you find what may be regarded as the essence of poetry examined with clearer insight, with more depth and penetration, than in the pages of Carlyle. He goes to the very root of the question. The same discernment may be seen in his critical remarks on humour, a subject, like poetry, difficult to treat with freshness, but upon which Carlyle has something to say well worth listening to. No one can read what he has to say on the humour of Richter without perceiving that he saw deep into the subject, and comprehended it fully. No one can read his criticisms on German authors and

German literature without perceiving that they are full of weighty thought expressed with clearness and decision. In them Carlyle stands forth prominently as a writer of great power, who is capable of taking an original view of the most abstruse questions that may turn up, whether in literature or philosophy. It is not only on poetry and the poets that his criticisms are valuable. On Idealism, Transcendentalism, Mysticism,—on these and such like subjects he writes with the same penetration and with the same full knowledge as in his strictly literary criticisms. His reasoning on these questions is close and cogent, with no fault unless it be that of being too emphatic and too full of meaning. Nowhere, perhaps, will you find a clearer explanation of what may be considered the essential features of Kant's philosophy than is to be found in Carlyle's observations on that subject.

As regards German authors in general it may be truly said that Carlyle has done more than any other writer to raise them to their true place in the literature of Europe. That the Germans themselves—those among them the most worthy and the most capable of judging —were not ungrateful, may be seen from the letters addressed to Carlyle by Goethe, expressing satisfaction with his work, especially with his biography of Schiller. He praises in Carlyle the

careful study bestowed upon Schiller's writings, and the clear insight thus obtained into his character and high merits as a poet. Equally pleased was he with the discernment displayed by Carlyle in his criticism upon his own *Helena*, which he admired for its depth and penetration.

One of the most admirable things about Carlyle's literary criticism is, that he writes with a full knowledge of his subject. When he treats of German authors, it is evident that he had read their works with close attention before venturing to criticise them. If we look, for example, at his review of Goethe's *Faust*, it will be seen that he had read the work over and over again, and by this careful perusal made himself fully master of it. The same discerning criticism, founded upon careful study, is seen in his observations on those two great world-poets, Dante and Shakespeare. If fault were to be found anywhere, even in the slightest degree, with Carlyle's literary criticism, it might be pointed out that his estimate of Sir Walter Scott is somewhat disappointing. His prejudice against works of fiction appears to have blinded him to the transcendent merits of this illustrious writer. But if his review of Scott be somewhat disappointing and less generous than the subject demands, the same cannot be said of his admirable essay on Burns, whose poems and

songs he criticises with much impartiality and in a wholly sympathetic spirit.

Carlyle's literary criticisms are to be found chiefly in those volumes of his miscellaneous works reprinted under the name of *Essays*. But they are not wholly wanting in some of his other works. The fine criticism on Dante and Shakespeare, and likewise that on the Koran, are found in the *Lectures on Heroes*. Some casual literary criticism is also met with in the *Life of Sterling*. Here Carlyle recurs again to the question, What is poetry? and, finding that his young friend, however ambitious he might be of shining as a poet, has in reality no depth of *tune*, he strongly advises him to stick to prose. It may be observed in passing, that in the second notice of Goethe comprised in the *Essays* there is some valuable criticism on our own poets, Gray and Goldsmith, which, however it may appear to some as out of place where it stands, displays much critical insight.

Carlyle would not be Carlyle if he were not sometimes severe in his criticisms. Certain English books on German literature he handles very roughly. And notwithstanding his partiality for German authors in general, some of the less meritorious among them receive severe chastisement at his hands. It is thus he speaks of one of Werner's dramas:—

"In our view it is the worst of all his pieces; a pale, bloodless, indeed quite ghost-like affair; for a cold breath, as from a sepulchre, chills the heart in perusing it; . . . there is no passion or interest, but a certain woe-struck martyr zeal, or rather frenzy, and this not so much stormy as shrieking; not loud and resolute, but shrill, hysterical and bleared with ineffectual tears."

We know also with what acidity he speaks of those authors, English and Prussian, who have written respectively on Cromwell and on Frederick the Great.

If there was any quality which Carlyle as a critic insisted upon and admired beyond all others in every branch of literature, and indeed in all the fine arts, including painting, sculpture, and even music, it was what he styles "Reality." He tells us that he was constantly saying to himself "study Reality; search out its quite endless mystery." In one place he says—"Daily too I see there is no true poetry but in Reality." Again he says in his figurative way—"The Ideal always has to grow in the Real, and to seek out its bed and board there, often in a very sorry way. No beautiful Poet is a Bird-of-Paradise, living on perfumes; sleeping in the ether with outspread wings." In his article on Boswell's *Johnson* he again sings [illegible] of "Reality." There are things, h-

value apparently, "but great with the greatness of Reality; for the thing exhibited is no vision but a fact." All this (and he often recurs to the subject elsewhere) shows what a hold this idea had upon him and how deeply it had sunk into his mind.

It may be well in conclusion to give one or two examples of Carlyle's literary criticism.

On the subject of German criticism he observes:—

"Far from being behind other nations in the practice or science of Criticism, it is a fact, for which we fearlessly refer to all competent judges, that they are distinctly and even considerably in advance. We state what is already known to a great part of Europe to be true. Criticism has assumed a new form in Germany; it proceeds on other principles, and proposes to itself a higher aim. The grand question is not now a question concerning the qualities of diction, the coherence of metaphors, the fitness of sentiments, the general logical truth, in a work of art, as it was some half century ago among most critics; neither is it a question mainly of a psychological sort, to be answered by discovering and delineating the peculiar nature of the poet from his poetry, as is usual with the best of our own critics at present: but it is, not indeed exclusively, but inclusively of those two other questions properly and ultimately a question on the essence and peculiar life of the poetry itself. The first of these questions, as we see it answered, for instance, in the criticisms of Johnson and Kames, relates, strictly speaking,

to the *garment* of poetry; the second indeed, to its *body* and material existence, a much higher point; but only the last to its *soul* and spiritual existence, by which alone can the body, in its movements and phases, be *informed* with significance and rational life. The problem is not now to determine by what mechanism Addison composed sentences, and struck out similitudes, but by what far finer and more mysterious mechanism Shakespeare organised his dramas, and gave life and individuality to his Ariel and his Hamlet. Wherein lies that life; how have they attained that shape and individuality? Whence comes that empyrean fire, which irradiates their whole being, and pierces, at least in starry gleams, like a diviner thing, into all hearts? . . . This is the task of Criticism, as the Germans understand it."

Of Goethe's style Carlyle thus speaks :—

"Freedom, and grace, and smiling earnestness are the characteristics of his works: the matter of them flows along in chaste abundance, in the softest combination; and their style is referred to by native critics as the highest specimen of the German tongue. On this latter point the vote of a stranger may well be deemed unavailing; but the charms of Goethe's style lie deeper than the mere words; for language, in the hands of a master, is the express image of thought, or rather it is the body of which thought is the soul; the former rises into being together with the latter, and the graces of the one are shadowed forth in the movements of the other. Goethe's language, even to a foreigner, is full of character and secondary meanings; polished, yet vernacular and cordial, it sounds like the dialect of

wise, ancient and true-hearted men: in poetry, brief, sharp, simple and expressive; in prose, perhaps still more pleasing; for it is at once concise and full, rich, clear, unpretending and melodious; and the sense, not presented in alternating flashes, piece after piece revealed and withdrawn, rises before us in continuous dawning, and stands at last simultaneously complete, and bathed in the mellowest and ruddiest sunshine. It brings to mind what the prose of Hooker, Bacon, Milton, Browne would have been, had they written under the good, without the bad influences, of that French precision, which has polished and attenuated, trimmed and impoverished, all modern languages; made our meaning clear, and too often shallow as well as clear."

Speaking of the state of our own literature at the time when Goethe's *Sorrows of Werter* appeared, Carlyle says:—

"Everywhere, as in Germany, there was polish and languor, external glitter and internal vacuity; it was not fire, but a picture of fire, at which no soul could be warmed. Literature had sunk from its former vocation: it no longer held the mirror up to Nature; no longer reflected, in many-coloured expressive symbols, the actual passions, the hopes, sorrows, joys of living men; but dwelt in a remote conventional world, in *Castles of Otranto*, in *Epigoniads* and *Leonidases*, among clear, metallic heroes, and white, high, stainless beauties, in whom the drapery and elocution were nowise the least important qualities. Men thought it right that the heart should swell into magnanimity with Caractacus and Cato, and melt into sorrow with many an Eliza and Adelaide; but the heart was in no haste either to swell or to melt.

Some pulses of heroical sentiment, a few *un*natural tears might, with conscientious readers, be actually squeezed forth on such occasions: but they came only from the surface of the mind; nay, had the conscientious man considered of the matter, he would have found that they ought not to have come at all. Our only English poet of the period was Goldsmith; a pure, clear, genuine spirit, had he been of depth or strength sufficient: his *Vicar of Wakefield* remains the best of all modern Idyls; but it is and was nothing more. And consider our leading writers; consider the poetry of Gray, and the prose of Johnson. The first a laborious mosaic, through the hard, stiff lineaments of which little life or true grace could be expected to look: real feeling, and all freedom of expressing it, are sacrificed to pomp, to cold splendour; for vigour we have a certain mouthing vehemence, too elegant indeed to be tumid, yet essentially foreign to the heart, and sure to extend no deeper than the mere voice and gestures. Were it not for his *Letters*, which are full of warm exuberant power, we might almost doubt whether Gray was a man of genius; nay, was a living man at all, and not rather some thousand-times more cunningly devised poetical turning-loom, than that of Swift's Philosophers in Laputa. Johnson's prose is true, indeed, and sound, and full of practical sense: few men have seen more clearly into the motives, the interests, the whole walk and conversation of the striving busy world as it lay before him; but farther than this busy, and, to most of us, rather [redacted] he seldom looked. Prudence is the hig [redacted] inculcate; and for that finer port [redacted] portion of it which [redacted] so called, where

our highest feelings, our best joys and keenest sorrows, our Doubt, our Love, our Religion reside, he has no word to utter; no remedy, no counsel to give us in our straits; or at most, if, like poor Boswell, the patient is importunate, will answer: 'My dear Sir, endeavour to clear your mind of Cant.'"

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CARLYLE AS A WRITER.

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE OF TRUTH—ACCURACY—PASSION FOR FACTS.

It may be said of Carlyle that from his youth upwards he devoted himself heart and soul to literature. In it he found his true vocation. He was emphatically an earnest student, seeking out the truth with his whole soul, searching for it as for hid treasure. From the first, on whatever subject he wrote, he was careful to form his own independent opinions, regardless of what others had said before him. From the first he showed himself serious and earnest in seeking truth alone, mindful of the sacredness of his calling. In his writings you see a man wholly in earnest, bent upon getting at the truth and persuading others to think as he thinks. In the very earliest of his compositions there is a tone indicating that he speaks the real convictions of his heart. You have before you a writer who

speaks out bravely what he actually believes, and who is bent upon storming the strongholds of error wherever he finds them. In reading an author you always, from the general tone of his writings, form an idea of his character. You have always impressed upon you his distinct personality. The impression you receive of Carlyle's personality from the perusal of his writings is that of a downright sincere man, who declares the truth that is in him without fear or favour. You feel that he thoroughly believes what he says, and that no earthly consideration would make him swerve one iota from it. We cannot doubt, then, that one of the most prominent features of Carlyle's literary character is his earnest love of truth. From the first page of his writings to the last we feel that his heart moves with his pen, and that he makes no statement and expresses no opinion of the absolute truth of which he was not fully convinced.

In harmony with this love of truth we are prepared to find in Carlyle the most scrupulous accuracy. This accuracy extends in all directions, not only to the statement of facts, the description of places, and the exact date of any event that comes under his notice, but it goes further. Wherever he perceives an error he corrects it. When he sees misquotations, misspellings, or misprints, he is careful to correct them all. His

minute accuracy extends to the very punctuation of what he wrote. We see the same minute accuracy in the published indexes to his various works, which bear unmistakable traces of his own careful supervision. Everywhere, in great matters and in small, he shows the same intense passion for accuracy.

This scrupulous accuracy so characteristic of Carlyle belonged to his very nature, and he could not have thrown it off even had he wished it. As regards facts and dates, and such matters, it was greatly aided by his tenacious memory, which refused to let slip what it had once got hold of, combined with his wide acquaintance with many books which he had read, not superficially, but with the closest attention. All his life he was a great reader, from his boyhood up to his latest days, and by this means he had laid up an immense store of accurate information from which he could draw to any extent as occasion required.

Everywhere in Carlyle's writings you may observe his passion for facts. In what he writes his attention is directed to facts, not to words. Hence, his manner and style of writing is generally concise. You never find him beating about the bush and using such phrases as "I flatter myself;" "If I mistake not." All such circumlocution he deems superfluous, and prefers

writing in a direct downright way, using, as a rule, plain words of Saxon origin.

His direct manner of writing, brushing beauty and elegance aside, and subordinating them to a concise statement of facts, is seen conspicuously in his description of places and local scenery. For example, he thus describes a pretty Welsh village:—

"Llanblethian hangs pleasantly, with its white cottages, and orchard and other trees, on the western slope of a green hill; looking far and wide over green meadows and little or bigger hills, in the pleasant plain of Glamorgan; a short mile to the south of Cowbridge, to which smart little town it is properly a kind of suburb."

Compare this with the more diffuse, though in its way beautiful description of the same village by John Sterling, when he revisited it at the age of twenty-one. The style of the latter is extremely correct, somewhat stately, and aims at being fine. No one can fail to see that the two styles are totally different. While Carlyle throws away all superfluous words, Sterling, on the other hand, writes in a flowing diffuse manner. After quoting Sterling's diffuse and carefully-worded description of this pretty Welsh village, Carlyle immediately adds in his matter-of-fact way, "In Cowbridge is some kind of Free School." All Welsh villages are not so pretty as

Llanblethian. The following is Carlyle's realistic picture of another of these villages :—

"Not generally beautiful, though it might be, if swept. Stones, old kettles, naves of wheels, all kinds of broken litter, with live pigs and etceteras, lie about the streets: for, as a rule, no rubbish is removed, but waits patiently the action of mere natural chemistry and accident."

One other example may be given of Carlyle's extreme attention to facts in his description of places. He is speaking of Falmouth, one of those places to which John Sterling went in search of health.

"Open cheery heights, rather bare of wood; fresh south-western breezes; a brisk laughing sea, swept by industrious sails, and the nets of a most stalwart wholesome frank and interesting population: the clean little fishing, trading and packet Town; hanging on its slope towards the Eastern sun, close on the waters of its basin and intricate bay,—with the miniature Pendennis Castle seaward on the right, the miniature St Mawes landward to left, and the mining world and the farming world open boundlessly to the rear: all this made a pleasant outlook and environment."

We seem to see the place before us as in a picture, every feature brought out in sharp outline and with realistic truth.

CHAPTER X.

POETRY IN HIS STYLE—OPULENCE OF LANGUAGE—DEEP THOUGHT.

ANOTHER characteristic feature in Carlyle's writings is seen in the poetry that pervades them. Carlyle tried hard to write in verse, but his attempts in this line were a comparative failure. The trammels of verse hampered him and interrupted the free flow of thought. But, if somewhat deficient in the outward form, he possessed the spirit of poetry in a high degree. This is seen in the figurative modes of expression which are so conspicuous in his writings, and which remind us of the poets. His turn of thought as well as expression is often poetical. In his happier moments he wrote a kind of poetic prose. We may say there is a tender poetic element found in the pages of Carlyle, not indeed continuous, but bursting out here and there. It is this tender poetic element, casually met with, like flowers blooming among rocks and briars, that endears him to many readers, who feel that here they are on holy ground, and that

in these beautiful lines they have a message from on high.

See with what poetic tenderness, in his *Past and Present*, he speaks of the good landlord Edmund, and the lamentations and abundant tears shed over him when he died. It is thus Carlyle speaks :—

"Landlord Edmund was seen and felt by all men to have done verily a man's part in this life-pilgrimage of his; and benedictions, and outflowing love and admiration from the universal heart, were his meed. Well done! well done! cried the hearts of all men. They raised his slain and martyred body; washed its wounds with fast-flowing universal tears; tears of endless pity, and yet of a sacred joy and triumph. The beautifullest kind of tears,—indeed perhaps the beautifullest kind of thing: like a sky all flashing diamonds and prismatic radiance; all weeping, yet shone on by the everlasting Sun:—and *this* is not a sky, it is a Soul and living Face! Nothing liker the *Temple of the Highest*, bright with some real effulgence of the Highest, is seen in this world."

In the same poetic strain, when speaking of the mother of a German writer of great genius, who was at first far from popular with the reading public, whom the critics handled roughly, and upon whom publishers for many long years looked coldly, he describes her as waiting long in sorrow, but before she died as witnessing the dawning fame of her son, and then adds—"Her

early sunshine, long drowned in deluges, again looked out at evening with sweet farewell." Hear, too, how he speaks of the "Corn-Law Rhymer," whom he describes as having some true poetry in him:—"Some little fraction of a rainbow: hues of joy and harmony, painted out of troublous tears, . . . a little prismatic blush, glowing genuine among wet clouds." Such imaginative lines are not infrequent in Carlyle's writings. To give one more example. In his last illness John Sterling, every day or two, used to address a letter to his eldest boy, then at school. Carlyle observes:—

"These letters I have lately read: they give, beyond any he has written, a noble image of the intrinsic Sterling; the same face we had long known, but painted now as on the azure of Eternity, serene, victorious divinely sad; the dusts and extraneous disfigurements imprinted on it by the world, now washed away."

Corresponding to this poetic vein of thought is the pictorial way in which he presents his subject before the eyes of his readers. As a writer, Carlyle is not dry and pointed in his style of teaching. He is pictorial; and this not only in his language, but in his mode of unfolding his thoughts. He does not write closely and argumentatively. He does not take up the salient points of an argument and reason upon

them in terse perspicuous language, in a vein of shrewd common sense addressed mainly to the understanding. He places the subject before you in such a way as to interest the imagination and touch the heart. Take that first chapter of *Past and Present*, where is painted in lively colours the insufficiency of riches to make a man happy. It is not the author's power of reasoning that convinces you. It is his attractive way of presenting the subject that carries all before it. Observe, also, how, in the same *Past and Present*, he shows that under our fine plan of Universal Suffrage the average elector will choose for his representative in Parliament not the best man or the most worthy, but one who is like himself, who reflects faithfully his own selfishness, prejudices, and ignorance, Bobus the sausage-maker invariably giving his vote for another "Bobus," or, if he can be found, for Bobissimus. This idea he unfolds in a somewhat eccentric way, as is his wont, but in a manner intelligible to all, presenting, not an analysis or a chain of reasoning, but a picture—a broad picture,—not without some touches of the ludicrous and grotesque.

This pictorial way of delivering his thoughts is often, where his feelings are deeply stirred, combined with great opulence of language. He thus speaks of his young friend John Sterling,

as he appeared in the earlier years of their acquaintance:—

"He was full of bright speech and argument; radiant with arrowy vitalities, vivacities and ingenuities. Less than any man he gave you the idea of ill-health. Hopeful, sanguine, projecting himself in aerial pulses like an aurora borealis, like a summer dawn, and filling all the world with present brightness for himself and others. Ill-health? Nay you found at last it was the very excess of *life* in him that brought on disease. This restless play of being, fit to conquer the world, could it have been held and guided, could not be held. It had worn *holes* in the outer case of it, and there found vent for itself,—there, since not otherwise."

Nowhere in all his writings is this imaginative opulence of language more apparent than in the *Life of Sterling*. But we have examples of it, neither few nor far between, in his other works also, and it may be considered a general characteristic of his literary style. In the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* we meet with the following characteristic description of the idle Eastern potentate:—

"Given an idle potentate, monster of opulence, gluttonous bloated Nawaub, of black colour or of white,—naturally he will have prating story-tellers to amuse his half-sleepy hours of rumination; if from his deep gross stomach, sinking overloaded as if towards its last torpor, they can elicit any transient glow of interest, tragic or comic, especially any wrinkle of momentary laughter, however idle, great shall be their reward.

Wits, story-tellers, ballad-singers, especially dancing girls, are in much request with such gluttonous half-sleeping, black or white Monster of Opulence."

We may observe how fully he brings out the idea. There is almost too great opulence of words, but there is unmistakable meaning under them.

Combined with this poetic vein of thought, and this abundant opulence of language, there will be found a more than ordinary depth in much that Carlyle wrote. On speculative subjects the questions that most attracted him were such as are deep and beyond our power to fathom. The mysteries of external nature, the mysterious depths in the soul of man,—with thoughts that wander through eternity, with those boundless passions ranging through all degrees, on the one hand high as Heaven, and on the other reaching down to Tophet,—on these and such-like themes he delights to dwell. Everywhere the infinite, the mysterious, and unfathomable had a peculiar charm for him. Hence his fondness for those mystic lines of Shakespeare to which he recurs so often :—

> "We are such stuff
> As dreams are made of, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

Yes, though this is sometimes denied, Carlyle was a mystic, at least in the earlier years of his literary life, and we cannot but agree with John

Mill, who, on meeting him in London, saluted him as the chief of the mystics.

There is unmistakable depth and insight in many of Carlyle's thoughts, even when he dwells on less transcendental subjects than the mysteries of nature. See what he says about the great importance in art of studying "Reality." His words have both truth and depth in them. Look again at what he says about the continuity of events, the close connection subsisting between the present and the past in all that happens, the former being always the descendant and lineal heir of the latter. This is an idea with which Carlyle was greatly impressed, and it has undoubted depth in it. Even when he dwells on more familiar topics we see a deep sagacity in his manner of viewing them. Look, for example, at what he says about "discipline" in an army, where it is seen that, by means of this principle, one man can move hundreds of thousands, each unit of whom, it may be, love him not, "the word of command becoming, almost in the literal sense, a magic word." Thus does he look beyond the surface of things into their inner soul and being. It is perhaps in such thoughts as these, which are both deep and true, that we recognise Carlyle's best title to the name by which he is so generally known of "The Sage of Chelsea."

Were an illustration needed of Carlyle's depth of view, combined with that pictorial style in which he excelled, it might be found in what he says on the subject of symbols in the earlier pages of his *French Revolution*. These are his words:—

"Observe however that of man's whole terrestrial possessions and attainments unspeakably the noblest are his Symbols, divine or divine-seeming, under which he marches and fights with victorious assurance in this life-battle: what we can call his Realized Ideals. Of which Realized Ideals, omitting the rest, consider only these two: his Church, or Spiritual Guidance; his Kingship, or temporal one. . . . The Church: what a word was there: richer than Golconda or the treasures of the world! In the heart of the remotest mountains rises the little Kirk; the Dead all slumbering round it, under their white memorial-stones, 'in hope of a happy resurrection':—dull wert thou, O Reader, if never in any hour (say of moaning midnight, when such Kirk hung spectral in the sky, and Being was as if swallowed up of Darkness) it spoke to thee—things unspeakable, that went to thy soul's soul. Strong was he that had a Church, what we can call a Church: he stood thereby, though 'in the centre of Immensities, in the conflux of Eternities,' yet manlike towards God and man; the vague shoreless Universe had become for him a firm city, and dwelling which he knew. Such virtue was in Belief; in these words, well spoken: I *believe*. Well might men prize their *Credo*, and raise stateliest Temples for it, and reverend Hierarchies, and give it the tithe of their substance; it was worth living for and dying for."

"Neither was that an inconsiderable moment when wild armed men first raised their Strongest aloft on the buckler throne, and, with clanging armour and hearts, said solemnly: Be thou our Acknowledged Strongest! In such Acknowledged Strongest (well named King, or Man that was Able) what a Symbol shone now for them,—significant with the destinies of the world! A symbol of true Guidance in return for loving Obedience; properly, if he knew it, the prime want of man. A Symbol which might be called sacred; for is there not, in reverence for what is better than we, an indestructible sacredness? On which ground, too, it was well said there lay in the Acknowledged Strongest a divine right; as surely there might in the Strongest, whether Acknowledged or not,—considering *who* it was that made him strong. And so in the midst of confusions and unutterable incongruities (as all growth is confused), did this of Royalty, with Loyalty environing it, spring up; and grow mysteriously, subduing and assimilating (for a principle of Life was in it); till it also had grown world-great, and was among the main Facts of our modern existence."

CHAPTER XI.

CARELESS STYLE—ABRUPT CONTRASTS—ADAPTATION TO SUBJECT.

A DISTINCT feature of Carlyle's literary style is seen in his carelessness and utter disregard of studied neatness or elegance. Of his later works in particular it may be observed that he is at no pains to select his words, but takes those that come first, writing in hot haste and without the fear of the critic before his eyes. Such expressions as these turn up continually—"Brevity is very urgent on us," "It had not turned to much," "There is a good few of them," "Let them complain their fill," "This is the infalliblest result of Unwisdom; and also the hatefulest, immeasurablest." In all these instances, and in others that might be quoted without number, Carlyle is at no pains to write carefully. As for elegance of expression, not only does he not study it, he spurns it from him.

Not but that Carlyle could write differently when he chose. In his earliest writings, as is seen in his literary essays, the style is fastidiously correct, correct even to the point of stiffness.

It is in his later works that he fell into a careless, loose-jointed style. Yet up to the last he could, when he pleased, be extremely correct. His letters in reply to those of young men who sought his advice are generally written with elaborate care. Equally studied and correct are those written by him on more formal occasions. Even his home letters, those addressed to his mother and his brother John, have few traces of careless expression. While some of his letters to his wife are written in an off-hand manner, others are careful studies, so much so as to have provoked the remark from her sharp tongue that they were intended for his biography. Nor must it be forgotten that, even in his latest works, while some passages are loose and slovenly in point of expression, others are written with the utmost care, and are faultlessly correct.

A characteristic feature of Carlyle's literary method is seen in his abrupt contrasts, where he passes rapidly and without preparation from one train of thought and one tone of sentiment to another, placing in close juxtaposition the grave and the gay, the sublime and the ridiculous, the solemn and the grotesque. The same diversity may be observed in his style of expression, which is now careless in a high degree, uncouth and even ungrammatical, now severely correct, pure, and melodious.

This diversity, this variety and inequality is not found to any great extent in the *Essays* or in the *Lectures on Heroes*, which are for the most part uniform both as regards thought and expression; but it abounds in his later writings. Some of the chapters of *Sartor Resartus* savour of the buffoon, some of them are dreary and wearisome. But there are others where the author writes as one inspired, and pours forth a stream of lofty thought. This *Sartor* is indeed, in some respects, a most irritating book, in which noble passages are not unfrequently mingled with others of a totally different character. Thus, for example, that high-toned chapter on the "Everlasting Yea" is succeeded by one that is commonplace and dreary, flat, stale, and unprofitable, written as if in mockery of what had just been said before.

We see this defiance of uniformity, and this fondness for sharp contrasts in the *French Revolution* also, where some parts, written in a hurried manner, are followed by others penned with deliberate care. Dreary passages there are in the book, where the patience of the reader is sorely tried; but they are followed by others of thrilling interest, where his attention is kept fully awake. Nor must we overlook the art with which the heroic conduct of some of the innocent victims of the Revolution is placed in fine

contrast to the horrors and angry passions of the period.

In his *Past and Present* the same characteristic is apparent. Read, for example, that beautiful passage where the people are described as shedding abundant tears over the martyred body of the good Landlord Edmund. It is written with exquisite skill, or rather with that inspiration which surpasses the most laboured composition. Yet tender as it is, it is preceded and followed by and intermingled with passages altogether different in tone. Nor is this feature wanting in some of Carlyle's other works. An example of this sudden change of mood and rapid transition from one train of thought to another may be seen in the *Life of Sterling*, where, after the letter describing so vividly the violent tornado at St Vincent, and the widespread ruin it caused, we read these words:—

"This Letter, I observe, is dated 28th Aug. 1831; which is otherwise a day of mark to the world and me —the Poet Goethe's last birthday. While Sterling sat in the Tropical solitudes penning this Letter, little European Weimar had its carriages and State-carriages busy on the streets, and was astir with compliments and visiting cards."

Other examples, equally striking, might be given from the same work. One of the most remarkable contrasts found in Carlyle's writings

is met with in the last of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, where the author, after discoursing cynically on what he calls "Pig-Philosophy," bursts out unexpectedly in eloquent strains on the importance in literature, and in all the fine arts, of cultivating "Reality," of keeping close to Nature; to which is added a fresh outburst of eloquence on what constitutes the true greatness of nations.

It may be observed, further, that Carlyle has the power in a remarkable degree of suiting his expression to the occasion. It has been said that in the *French Revolution* the author's style, in its fire and general explosiveness, bears some resemblance to the events described. This is true of particular passages. And it would not be difficult to find examples of the same adaptation of style to the sense in his other works. Take that paragraph in the *Life of Sterling* describing the unhappy fate of "Torrijos" and his party, captured when landing on the coast of Spain and immediately led to execution. Carlyle says, abruptly—"Express sent to Madrid: express instantly returns—'Military execution on the instant; give them shriving if they want it; that done fusilade them all.'" No time is lost here in describing the scene, which passes before you rapidly, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye.

The same vehemence, the same disposition to suit the word to the action, is seen in the following characteristic account of the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham by Felton :—

"One day in the latter end of August, John Felton, a short swart Suffolk gentleman of military air, went out to walk in the eastern parts of London. Walking on Tower Hill, full of black reflections on his own condition, and on the condition of England, and a Duke of Buckingham holding all England down into the jaws of ruin and disgrace,—John Felton saw, in evil hour, on some cutler's stall there, a broad sharp hunting-knife, price one shilling. John Felton, with a wild flash in the dark heart of him, bought the said knife; rode down to Portsmouth with it, where the great Duke then was; struck the said knife, with one fell plunge, into the great Duke's heart."

In his serener mood Carlyle can write more serenely. It is thus he describes the moral character of John Sterling :—

"In purity of character, in the so-called moralities, in all manner of proprieties of conduct, so as tea-tables and other human tribunals rule them, he might be defined as perfect, according to the world's pattern: in these outward and tangible respects, the world's criticism of him must have been praise and that only. An honourable man and good citizen; discharging, with unblamable correctness, all functions and duties laid on him by the customs of the society he lived in,—with correctness and something more. In all these particulars, a man perfectly *moral*, or of approved virtue according to the rules.

"Nay in the far more essential tacit virtues, which are not marked on stone tables, or so apt to be insisted on by human creatures over tea or elsewhere,—in clear and perfect fidelity to Truth wherever found, in child-like and soldierlike, pious and valiant loyalty to the Highest, and what of good and evil that might send him,—he excelled among good men. The joys and the sorrows of his lot he took with true simplicity and acquiescence. Like a true son, not like a miserable mutinous rebel, be comported himself in this Universe. Extremity of distress,—and surely his fervid temper had enough of contradiction in this world,—could not tempt him into impatience at any time. By no chance did you ever hear from him a whisper of those mean repinings, miserable arraignings and questionings of the Eternal Power, such as weak souls even well disposed will sometimes give way to in the pressure of their despair; to the like of this he never yielded, or showed the least tendency to yield;—which surely was well on his part. For the Eternal Power, I still remark, will not answer the like of this, but silently and terribly accounts it impious, blasphemous and damnable, and now as heretofore will visit as such. Not a rebel but a son, I said;—willing to suffer when Heaven said Thou shalt;—and withal, what is perhaps rarer in such a combination, willing to rejoice also, and right cheerily taking the good that was sent, whensoever or in whatever form it came. A pious soul we may justly call him; devoutly submissive to the will of the Supreme in all things."

CHAPTER XII.

CARLYLE'S HUMOUR—ITS CHARACTER—ILLUSTRATIONS.

ANOTHER feature of Carlyle as a writer appears in his talent for humour. *Hudibras, Tristram Shandy,* and *Reinecke Fuchs* (Reynard the Fox) were among the first books he read with keen interest. From this we may see his early bent; and doubtless these books reacted upon his mind and exercised an important influence upon his mode of viewing things. He confesses himself that perhaps from *Reinecke Fuchs* originated his whole Philosophy of Clothes as unfolded to us in *Sartor Resartus.* His humour after the manner of Sterne began to develop itself in his first attempts at composition. One of his young college friends with whom he corresponded is found complimenting him upon his "very humorous letter," a letter, he observes, remarkable for vivacity and a "Shandean turn of expression." It thus appears that even when a student at college Carlyle inclined to that style of writing.

A vein of comic humour is seen running through much that Carlyle wrote. Take, for

instance, that passage in his *French Revolution* where the inhabitants of Paris are described as industriously providing supplies of all kinds for the patriotic army on the frontiers. There is a want of gunpowder, and the important question arises—"What is to be done for Saltpetre?" Upon which the citizens set to work with all their might, seeking diligently in damp cellars and every conceivable place for this invaluable saltpetre. Ever as he writes a grim smile seems to mantle over the countenance of our author. There is the same comic humour and veiled sarcasm in his description of the disabled French warship *Vengeur*, with all the sailors assembled on deck shouting with enthusiasm "Vive Republique" as the vessel sinks under the waves. The story turns out to be a mere myth after all, and the author while he writes seems to be fully aware of the fact.

It must be said of Carlyle's humour that it is often wild and grotesque. Such is the exuberant unrestrained mirth in which our author revels in some portions of *Sartor Resartus*. Take, for example, the chapter on "Tailors." It is written in a humorous strain of wild banter which seems to outrun the limits of discretion, and with which the sympathy of the reader can hardly keep pace. In the chapter on "Old Clothes" our author ılges in the same overwrought strain of

humour, particularly where he descants cynically on our custom of honouring and paying respect to empty clothes, after all virtue has gone out of them.

There is often a strain of cynicism in Carlyle's humour. It is a caustic humour, and is more after the manner of Swift than of any other writer in our language. We miss in it the light, graceful, and amiable humour, entirely without gall, of Addison and Goldsmith. We miss in it the genial humour of Scott. As for the delicate and subtle humour of Charles Lamb, not only could Carlyle not imitate it, he could not even see it.

The following quotation may, both in its tone and subject, remind us of Swift's style of humour :—

"Among speculative persons, a question has sometimes risen: In the progress of Emancipation, are we to look for a time when all the Horses also are to be emancipated, and brought to the supply-and-demand principle? Horses too have 'motives,' are acted-on by hunger, fear, hope, love of oats, terror of platted leather; nay they have vanity, ambition, emulation, thankfulness, vindictiveness; some rude outline of all our human spiritualities,—a rude resemblance to us in mind and intelligence, even as they have in bodily frame. The Horse, poor dumb four-footed fellow, he too has his private feelings, his affections, gratitudes; and deserves good usage; no human, without crime, shall treat him

unjustly either, or recklessly lay-on the whip where it is not needed:—I am sure if I could make him 'happy,' I should be willing to grant a small vote for that object!

"Him too you occasionally tyrannise over, and with bad results to yourselves among others; using the leather in a tyrannous unnecessary manner; withholding, or scantily furnishing, the oats and ventilated stabling that are due. Rugged horse-subduers, one fears they are a little tyrannous at times. To remedy which, so far as remediable, fancy—the horses all 'emancipated'; restored to their primeval right of property in the grass of this Globe: turned-out to graze in an independent supply-and-demand manner! So long as grass lasts, I daresay they are very happy, or think themselves so. And Farmer Hodge sallying forth, on a dry spring morning, with a sieve of oats in his hand, and agony of eager expectation in his heart, is he happy? Help me to plough this day, Black Dobbin: oats in full measure if thou wilt. 'Hlunh, No—thank!' snorts Black Dobbin; he prefers glorious liberty and the grass. Bay Darby, wilt not thou perhaps? 'Hlunh!'—Gray Joan, then, my beautiful broad-bottomed mare,—O Heaven, she too answers Hlunh! Not a quadruped of them will plough a stroke for me. Corn-crops are *ended* in this world!—For the sake, if not of Hodge, then of Hodge's horses, one prays this benevolent practice might now cease, and a new and better one try to begin. Small kindness to Hodge's horses to emancipate them! The fate of all emancipated horses is, sooner or later, inevitable. To have in this habitable Earth, no grass to eat!"

the same *Latter-Day Pamphlets* Carlyle

thus replies to Jefferson Brick, the American editor, who twitted him with the monstrous "anomalies" of English society, such as giving bishops so much money for doing so little; in which reply, it will be allowed, there is both good sense and humour:—

"But what think you of the 'Bobus of Houndsditch' of our parts? He, sausage-maker on the great scale, knows the art of cutting fat bacon, and exposing it seasoned with gray pepper to advantage. Better than any other man he knows this art; and I take the liberty to say it is a poor one. Well, the Bishop has an income of five thousand pounds appointed him for his work; and Bobus, to such a length has he now pushed the trade in sausages, gains from the universal suffrage of men's souls and stomachs *ten* thousand a year by it.

"A poor art this of Bobus's, I say; and worth no such recompense. For it is not even good sausages he makes, but only extremely vendible ones; the cunning dog! Judges pronounce his sausages bad, and at the cheap price even dear; and finer palates, it is whispered, have detected alarming symptoms of horse flesh, or worse, under this cunningly devised gray-pepper spice of his; so that for the world I would not eat one of his sausages, nor would you. You perceive he is not an excellent honest sausage-maker, but a dishonest cunning and scandalous sausage-maker; *worth*, if he could get his deserts, who shall say what? Probably certain shillings a week; say forty; possibly (one shudders to think) a long round in the treadmill, and stripes instead of shillings! And yet what he gets, I tell you, from

universal suffrage and the unshackled *ne-plus-ultra* republican justice of mankind, is twice the income of that anomalous Bishop you were talking of!

"The Bishop I for my part do much prefer to Bobus. The Bishop has human sense and breeding of various kinds; considerable knowledge of Greek, if you should ever want the like of that; knowledge of many things; and speaks the English language in a grammatical manner. He is bred to courtesy, to dignified composure, as to a second nature; a gentleman every fibre of him; which of itself is something very considerable. The Bishop does really diffuse round him an influence of decorum, courteous patience, solid adherence to what is settled; teaches practically the necessity of 'burning one's own smoke'; and does practically in his own case burn said smoke, making lambent flame and mild illumination out of it for the good of men in several particulars. While Bobus, for twice the annual money,—brings sausages, possibly of horse flesh, cheaper to market than another! Brick, if you will reflect, it is not 'aristocratic England,' it is the united Posterity of Adam who are grown, in some essential respects, stupider than barbers' blocks. Barbers' blocks would at least say nothing, and *not* elevate, by their universal suffrages, an unfortunate Bobus to that bad height!"

CHAPTER XIII.

WORD-PORTRAITS—EXAMPLES.

In noticing the characteristic features of Carlyle as a writer it would not do to omit his remarkable word-portraits, which are met with not in his histories alone, but are scattered in profusion through some of his other works, including his private journals and letters. Carlyle appears to have cultivated the art of sketching the outward features of every remarkable man he met, however casually; and he generally succeeds in photographing them with unerring truth. In this way we have characteristic portraits of Coleridge, Daniel Webster, Grote the historian, Macaulay, Sir James Mackintosh, and many others, pen and ink sketches drawn rapidly and with a certain Hogarth-like vigour and fidelity.

The following may be taken as examples of Carlyle's miscellaneous word-portraits. Of Daniel Webster he gives us the following likeness:—

"A grim, tall, broad-bottomed yellow-skinned man, with brows like precipitous cliffs, and huge, black, dull, wearied, yet unweariable-looking eyes, under them;

amorphous projecting nose, and the angriest shut mouth I have ever seen. A droop on the sides of the upper lip is quite mastiff like—magnificent to look upon; it is so quiet withal. I guess, I should like ill to be that man's nigger."

Here is his word-portrait of Coleridge, then living at Highgate, and about sixty years old:—

"Brow and head were round and of massive weight, but the face was flabby and irresolute. The deep eyes, of a light hazel, were as full of sorrow as of inspiration; confused pain looked mildly from them, as in a kind of mild astonishment. The whole figure and air, good and amiable otherwise, might be called flabby and irresolute; expressive of weakness under possibility of strength. He hung loosely on his limbs, with knees bent, and stooping attitude; in walking he rather shuffled than decisively stept."

One of his word-portraits is that of Grote the historian, whom he met at a party on one occasion, and whose physiognomic features he hits off in the following style:—

"Radical Grote was the only novelty—a man with strait upper lip, large chin and open mouth (spout mouth); for the rest, a tall man with dull thoughtful brows, and lank dishevelled hair, greatly the look of a prosperous Dissenting Minister."

Of Charles Dickens, who had just written *Pickwick*, he says:—

"Clear, blue, intelligent eyes, eyebrows that he

arches amazingly, large protrusive rather loose mouth, a face of most extreme mobility, which he shuttles about—eyebrows, eyes, mouth, and all—in a very singular manner while speaking."

Of Edward Sterling's outward physiognomy he thus speaks :—

"He was broad, well built, stout of stature, had a long lowish head, sharp gray eyes, with large strong aquiline face to match; and walked, or sat, in an erect decisive manner."

Of Professor Wilson (Christopher North) he says :—

"He is a broad sincere man of six feet, with long dishevelled flax-coloured hair, and two blue eyes keen as an eagle's."

This is his portrait of Macaulay:—

"A squat, thick-set, low-browed, short, grizzled little man of fifty. These be thy gods, Oh Israel."

In 1831 he met Sir James Mackintosh casually at Jeffrey's, and describes him thus :—

"A broadish, middle-aged, grayheaded man, well dressed, and with a plain courteous bearing; gray intelligent eyes, in which plays a dash of cautious vivacity, triangular unmeaning nose, business mouth and chin."

One of the softest and least cynical of his portraits is that of Tennyson, whom he describes thus :—

"A fine, large-featured, dim-eyed, bronze-coloured, shaggy-headed man is Alfred, dusty, smoky, free-and-

easy, who swims outwardly and inwardly with great composure in an inarticulate element of tranquil chaos and tobacco smoke. Great now and then when he does emerge—a most restful, brotherly, solid-hearted man."

It will be observed that sketches like these, portraits in miniature, resemble caricatures, such as appear in the comic papers, where the facial features are brought out in bold relief and with some exaggeration. They are rough caricatures, but the general effect is that of a truthful and as it were speaking likeness. In addition to these brief sketches we have from the pen of Carlyle not a few full-length portraits drawn with deliberate care. That of Frederick the Great has been noticed, where the artist by repeated strokes presents us with a finished portrait, the figure standing out in full size and with lifelike reality. To this class belongs the portrait of John Sterling, which is minutely elaborate, more so perhaps than any of his other portraits, that of Frederick alone excepted; and even this it excels in one particular, inasmuch as it exhibits with minute detail the mind and character of the man, and not alone his external appearance. To this class, too, belongs the portrait of John Sterling's mother, in which, besides its other merits, we have an example of the tenderness with which Carlyle could delineate the character of those women whom

he admired, attracted by their virtues. It is as follows:—

"Mrs Sterling, even in her later days, had still traces of the old beauty: then and always she was a woman of delicate, pious, affectionate character; exemplary as a wife, a mother, and a friend. A refined female nature; something tremulous in it, timid, and with a certain rural freshness still unweakened by long converse with the world. The tall slim figure, always of a kind of quaker neatness; the innocent anxious face, anxious bright hazel eyes; the timid, yet gracefully cordial ways, the natural intelligence, instinctive sense and worth, were very characteristic. Her voice too; with its something of soft querulousness, easily adapting itself to a light thin-flowing style of mirth on occasion, was characteristic: she had retained her Ulster intonations; and was withal somewhat copious in speech. A fine tremulously sensitive nature, strong chiefly on the side of the affections, and the graceful insights and activities that depend on these:—truly a beautiful, much-suffering, much-loving, house-mother. . . . I remember her melodious rich plaintive tone of voice; and an exceedingly bright smile which she sometimes had, effulgent with sunny gaiety and true humour, among other fine qualities."

It will be observed that in all Carlyle's portraits the keenness of his glance is very apparent. No characteristic feature escapes him. What most people would have passed unnoticed he detected at once, however minute and delicate the trait might be. As an instance of this,

besides others that have been given, we may quote what he says of one who came casually under his observation, and whom he describes as having "small blue eyes, in which twinkled curiously a joyless smile." There is here a delicacy of observation which cannot be overlooked.

CHAPTER XIV.

STYLE OF EXPRESSION—METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE—COMMAND OF WORDS.

If we turn now more particularly to Carlyle's mode of expressing his thoughts, certain characteristic features may be observed which distinguish him as a writer. In the first place may be noticed his figurative style of expression. This is seen in his constant use of expressive metaphorical words. Thus he describes the sun as shining serenely in smokeless "mackerel-sky." Of a letter written by one of Cromwell's daughters he says that it comes to us as a small "flute-voice" across the wild disturbances. On one occasion he has a difficulty in getting information on some subject, but unexpectedly two small documents turn up, two poor "flint-sparks," as he styles them, which yield an uncertain light. Referring to the sure solace constant occupation affords to the afflicted in their sorest trials, he uses the expression "fire-proof" employments. Looking back to the period of the French Revolution, he speaks of the squalid multitude "in winged raggedness."

The river Ouse, before it enters the Fen-country, is spoken of as having still a "respectable drab-colour," and the fen country itself is of a very "dropsical character." In the same metaphorical vein he describes, in printer's phrase, certain arrangements which fell to pieces as "going all to pie." The successful London lawyer, who wears himself to skin and bone in his assiduous efforts to rise in his profession, is described as becoming a "spiritual *speldrin*." In comparing Cromwell with Napoleon, he does not hesitate to pronounce the former as the greater of the two, the stupendous victories of the other, which reached over all Europe, being only the high "stilts" on which he stood, while his actual stature was no way altered thereby. Describing one of the public acts of Frederick the Great soon after he came to the throne, that, namely, on religious toleration, Carlyle observes that, however much we may undervalue it now, from being so long accustomed to it, it was then extremely original, "and bright with the splendour of new gold." In such instances there is a picturesque vigour of language which is sometimes quite inimitable, where the meaning stands out in clear colours as if irradiated with a flash of light. We may observe that strong metaphorical expressions come quite natural to Carlyle, and drop from his pen on all occa-

sions. They are met with, not only in his more laboured productions, but also in his familiar letters thrown off in great haste. In a letter to his wife, written on glazed paper, from a friend's house, he excuses its illegibility, being forced, as he says, to write with "this leather pen."

This metaphorical language, which is so highly characteristic of Carlyle, is seen not only in single words and phrases, but is often found running through whole sentences. There is no want of examples. On the contrary, we are rather embarrassed by their abundance, and the difficulty lies in not knowing where to stop.

With reference to the "Three Estates" which met in Paris at the commencement of the French Revolution, and were unable to act in harmony, he says:—

"Your cunningly devised Taxing Machine has been got together; set up with incredible labour; and stands there, its three pieces in contact; its two fly-wheels of Noblesse and Clergy, its huge Working-wheel of Tiers-Etat. The two fly-wheels whirl in the softest manner, but, prodigious to look upon, the huge Working-wheel hangs motionless, refuses to stir."

In the same style, after describing the death of Robespierre, Carlyle says:—

"This insignificant stone they had struck out, so insignificant anywhere else, proved to be the keystone;

the whole arch-work and edifice of Sansculottism began to loosen, to crack, to yawn, and tumbled piecemeal, with considerable rapidity, plunge after plunge; till the Abyss had swallowed it all, and in this upper world Sansculottism was no more."

In the same figurative and semi-poetical way he thus expresses himself in another place :—

"For, though fierce travails, though wide seas and roaring gulfs lie before us, is it not something if a Loadstar in the eternal sky, do once more disclose itself; an everlasting light, shining through all cloud-tempests and roaring billows, ever as we emerge from the trough of the sea: the blessed beacon far off on the edge of the far horizons, towards which we are to steer incessantly for life."

And speaking of the temporary arrangements and makeshifts by which society is patched together again, after a revolutionary outburst, he says :—

"In such hateful oscillation, afloat as amid raging bottomless eddies and conflicting sea-currents, not steadfast as on fixed foundations, must European Society continue swaying, now disastrously tumbling, then painfully readjusting itself, at ever shorter intervals,—till once the *new* rock-basis does come to light, and the weltering deluges of mutiny, and of need to mutiny, abate again!"

In lighter mood he observes of John Sterling :—

"In lucid ingenious talk and logic, in all manner of

brilliant utterance and tongue-fence I have hardly known his fellow. . . . One of the most supple-wristed, dexterous, graceful and successful fencers in that line. Could do the parrying all round in a succession of blows swift as light, and plant his hits wherever a chance offered. . . . When the blows of contradiction came too thick, he could with consummate dexterity whisk aside out of their way; prick into his adversary on some new quarter; or gracefully flourishing his weapon, end the duel in some handsome manner."

Of the same young Sterling who had unhappily been left unprovided with a regular profession, Carlyle observes :—

"So swift, light-limbed and fiery an Arab courser ought, for all manner of reasons, to have been trained to saddle and harness. Roaming at full gallop over the heaths he suffered much, and did comparatively little. I have known few creatures whom it was more wasteful to send forth with the bridle thrown up, and to set to steeple-hunting instead of running on highways."

In connection with this bold metaphorical way of conveying his meaning, may be noticed Carlyle's great command of strong words, especially in the vituperative line, but not in that alone. His audacity, and often his felicity, in this respect is very remarkable. Speaking of the French statesman Mirabeau, he describes him as a man who will "glare" fiercely on any object and master it. Of the poet Burns he says that

his eyes "glowed," actually "glowed" when speaking on any subject that interested him. He is fond of using such expressive words as "blaring," "yawns," "athwart." When sending to his friends at home a copy of his *Lectures on Heroes* he describes them as a "goustrous" speaking out of his mind about many things. We see his fondness for words which have a very full meaning, such as "godlike" and "infinite" —words which express the sense in the highest degree and go, as it were, to the furthest horizon of human thought. The way in which, when expressing himself strongly, his thoughts sometimes struggle for utterance is not a little curious. Thus he speaks of a certain one's admiration of another as being a most intimate feeling, sufficiently apparent "in the very heart of his mind."

Carlyle's strong style of expression is seen in many of the numerous compound words he uses. He has a liking for such strong words as "owl-droppings" and "guano-mountains" and "bilge-water," which he applies indiscriminately to the writings of some of his predecessors. The word "mud-element" is part of his stock in trade. Thus Cromwell is described as struggling with the "mud-element." In a similar strain the poor Kaiser, after his various trials, is described as being at last wearied and disgusted with the

"shadow-hunt" of life. And speaking of the eager desire on all hands to make money, by fair means if possible, but at all events to make money, he sums it all up in the expressive word "Cash-Gospel," a phrase which may be said in itself to speak volumes. In truth Carlyle is seldom at a loss for a strong word to express his meaning forcibly. If he cannot find one, he can make one. When sneering at "respectability" he coins the words "gig-man" and "gig-manity," with which he appears to be uncommonly well pleased, for he uses them often; and to describe your fine gentleman, he applies to him the epithet "gilt-edged," a word which has the same stamp of originality. Or, if the word is not wholly original, Carlyle can find for it a new application. Speaking of the elder Sterling, who, while yet unknown to fame, used to write occasionally to the *Times* under the signature "Vetus," Carlyle says he could remember the same "Vetus" as a kind of editorial "hack-log" on which able editors were wont to chop straw now and then. And writing to his mother of a visit he had of Fonblanque, the editor of the *Examiner*, who had lately met with a severe accident, Carlyle describes him as coming in all braced with straps, and hanging together loosely, "you would have said by flail-cappins."

His strong way of expressing himself is not

only apparent in single words and phases, but it frequently runs through whole paragraphs and pages of what he wrote. Such at times is the exaggeration of his language that we listen to him with surprise, as to a man who is telling an incredible story. Speaking of the documents in the British Museum relating to Puritan times, he says there are tons upon tons and square miles of them, but lying all in confusion and without any attempt at arrangement. "The sound of them is not a *voice*, conveying knowledge or memorial of any earthly or heavenly thing; it is a widespread inarticulate slumberous mumblement, issuing as if from the lake of Eternal Sleep." The same documents he again describes as a putrid sea "in which you swim as in shoreless lake of ditchwater and bilgewater, a torpor to the human soul."

This is the strong way in which, in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, he speaks of "pauperism." He says:—

"Pauperism is the poisonous dripping from all the sins and putrid unveracities and God-forgetting greedinesses and devil-serving cants and jesuitisms that exist among us. . . . The Idle Workhouse, now about to burst of overfilling, what is it but the scandalous poison-tank of drainage from the universal Stygian quagmire of our affairs?"

In the same *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, speaking

of the difficulty of getting hold of your "supreme scoundrel," in order to hang him first of all, he bursts out in the following words:—

"Such buzzards and dullards and poor children of the Dusk are we, in spite of our Statistics, Unshackled Press and Torches of Knowledge;—not eagles soaring sunwards, not brothers of the light wings and radiances we; a dim, horn-eyed, owl-population; intent mainly on the catching of mice!"

As might be expected, the same strong passionate language is seen in some of his private letters, where he wrote under still less restraint than when addressing the public. On one occasion, just before setting out to visit some friends in Wales, he had bought an umbrella for his wife. A day or two after leaving, finding that Mrs Carlyle, who remained at home, had not yet received the umbrella, he was furious, and thus wrote in his next letter:—"The scoundrel umbrella vendor! Send Sterling in his brougham to thunder eight-ninths of the wretched tailor-life out of him." In another letter he recurs to the same subject and says—"Has that accursed chimera of a Cockney not sent the umbrella yet? I could see him trailed through and through the Thames for his scoundrel conduct." Such was the strong language in which Carlyle indulged, sometimes on the most trivial occasions!

CHAPTER XV.

STRANGE WORDS—STRANGE GRAMMAR—GENERAL REMARKS.

LET us now turn to some other peculiarities of expression which may be regarded as characteristic features of Carlyle's style. Among these may be noticed his strange words, some of them quite original and unattempted yet in prose or rhyme. We meet not unfrequently in his writings with such words as "ownness," "oneness," "generalousness," "nothingness," "barbadoesings," "noblenesses," "doable," "learnable," "unexecutable," "guessable," "rememberable," "misinterpretable," "fluidest," "remarkablest," "immeasurablest," "wonderfulest," "insidiouser," "worthship," "drownage," "visuality," "licit," "quotity," "veracities," "integrities," "impassivities," "aristocratism," "mumblement," "antecessors," "eye-sorrow," "anywhen," "in vice of." Among the many strange words Carlyle delights to honour must be ranked his remarkable compounds. They are in number numberless, and the following may serve as a few samples selected at random. We find in his

writings such words as "bare-backism," "pudding-headed," "world-great," "world-true," "time-world," "life-world," "life-frenzy," "life-battle," "death-birth," "death-winged," "air-image," "fire-bosom," "fire-breathing," "fiery-real," "smoke-cloud," "white-hot," "toil-wetted," "cash-gospel."

Another peculiarity of expression met with in Carlyle's writings is seen in the structure of his sentences. He is at no pains to write always with grammatical correctness. In his rough and ready way the sentences are sometimes left incomplete, hanging in the air as it were, nouns standing without verbs and verbs without nouns, in utter disregard of the ordinary rules of grammar. Such sentences as these occur:—"In Workhouses, pleasantly so named because work cannot be done in them;" "Of which, here and there, a glimpse may turn up;" "A Bill which seemed of no great consequence except financial." It is plain that in all such instances some words are needed to fill up the sentence and make it grammatically complete. Then observe the peculiar forms of speech met with in his writings, such as "of him" for *his*, "of it" for *its*, "of me" for *my*. We meet with such examples as these:—"the heart of him," the "aspect of him," "the sincerity of him," "upon the ribs of him," "the inner man of me," "the

conceit of me," "the tones of it," "the antagonist of it," "with hair on the cheeks of us." It is no wonder that such peculiarities of expression should have drawn down upon Carlyle much severe criticism, and that they should sometimes have been greatly exaggerated and described as pervading every sentence he wrote instead of being exceptions only met with here and there. In general he is correct enough in point of grammar, and writes according to the rules.

It may be observed that Carlyle, as a rule, uses homely words of Saxon origin. There is a plainness in his language resembling the speech of the common people. The sentence "How much has come and gone since then!" may be taken as a type of his style in much that he wrote. He affects also plain Saxon phrases, such as "no great shakes," and "at bottom." The latter phrase appears perhaps not less than half a dozen times in the *Lectures on Heroes* alone. Many of his expressive compound words exhibit the same tendency, such as "sprawls-up," "bleareyed," "dry-shod." But it may be observed that, while he generally expresses himself in homely Saxon phrase, he occasionally goes to the opposite extreme. What, for example, are we to make of such a sentence as this:—"For ours is a most fictile world; and man is the most fingent plastic of creatures." In the same spirit

we find him occasionally using such far-fetched words as "abysmal," "phantasmal," "fuliginous," "vulpine," and the like. A forcible word, however far-fetched, seldom comes amiss to him.

In his direct plainness of speech, as seen in his general style, and in his matter-of-fact manner, Carlyle resembles such writers as Swift and Defoe. Like them too he is very circumstantial in his way of writing, adding many minute details stated in a dry homely way.

It is characteristic of Carlyle in what he writes to attach, as I have said, great importance to facts. These facts are often jotted down carelessly, without any attempt to adorn them with fine words. We see this in some of his word-portraits, where the author seems so intent upon observing the physiognomic features, what may be called the facts of the face, as to be utterly regardless of the style in which he describes them. The same characteristic is seen, as has been observed, in his description of places, where he is at great pains to delineate the exact features that strike the eye, fixing his attention on them alone. We see it also in his histories, where facts, facts, facts are the great object of his attention. Even in those of his writings which approach nearest to works of fiction, such as *The Diamond Necklace*, he is careful to found upon hard facts. The "necklace" was no airy

vision which had existence only in his own brain; it was a real necklace made by human hands. Cagliostro and his female accomplice were both real characters who once lived and moved and cheated upon this habitable globe. So with that admirable Abbot Samson: he was not a fictitious abbot invented for the occasion, but a real man who acted his part well and bravely on the stage of life some centuries ago.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CARLYLE AS A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REFORMER.

CHAPTER XVI.

ORGANISATION OF LABOUR—SERFDOM—THE LAND QUESTION—OPEN SPACES.

CARLYLE comes before us not only as a historian and man of letters, but likewise as a social and political reformer. One of the leading social reforms he advocates has respect to the organisation of labour under Government inspection; or, in other words, the regulation of the industries of the country by the State. He would have the State search diligently on the right hand and the left for what he calls "Captains of Industry," under whom the operatives are to be "regimented," and industrial enterprises of all sorts conducted on a large scale. On this interesting subject, which is touched in *Past and Present*, and more fully discussed in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, Carlyle discourses in glowing language which cannot be read without emotion. The whole country under such a system presents itself to

his mind as a happy hive of industry, where all interests—those of operatives and employers alike—are fully reconciled, where strikes shall be no more, neither shall there be any more pauperism. It is thus that Carlyle speaks on such a theme:—

"Suppose the State to have fairly started its 'Industrial Regiments of the New Era,' which, alas, are yet only beginning to be talked of,—what continents of new real work opened out, for the Home and all other Public Offices among us! Suppose the Home Office looking out, as for life and salvation, for proper men to command these 'Regiments.' Suppose the announcement were practically made to all British souls that the want of wants, more indispensable than any jewel in the crown, was that of men *able to command men* in ways of industrial and moral welldoing; that the State would give its very life for such men; that such men *were* the State; that the quantity of them to be found in England, lamentably small at present, was the exact measure of England's worth,—what a new dawn of everlasting day for all British souls! Noble British soul, to whom the gods have given faculty and heroism, what men call genius, here at last is a career for thee."

Again he says further on:—

"Waste-land Industrials succeeding, other kinds of Industry, as cloth-making, shoe-making, plough-making, spade-making, house-building,—in the end, all kinds of Industry whatsoever, will be found capable of regimenting. Mill-operatives, all manner of free operatives, as

yet unregimented, nomadic under private masters, they, seeing such example and its blessedness, will say: 'Masters, you must regiment us a little; make our interests with you permanent a little, instead of temporary and nomadic; we will enlist with the State otherwise.' This will go on, on the one hand, while the State-operation goes on, on the other: thus will all Masters of Workmen, private Captains of Industry, be forced to incessantly cooperate with the State and its public Captains; they regimenting in their way, the State in its way, with ever-widening field; till their fields *meet* (so to speak) and coalesce, and there be no unregimented worker, or such only as are fit to remain unregimented, any more."

The question of organising labour properly under State management Carlyle regarded as the problem of the whole future. It was by this means, among other advantages, that he hoped to eradicate "pauperism" by attacking it at its source.

Turning to another point, it may be observed that Carlyle is by no means averse to those time-honoured institutions, slavery and serfdom, but thinks them very good in their place,—well adapted for certain states of society, and even in some modified form useful still among ourselves. The cry for universal enfranchisement is perfectly nauseous to him. Let us all be "free" of one another, we shall then be happy,—"free without bond or connection except that of cash-payment, fair day's wages for fair day's work;

bargained for by voluntary contract, and law of supply and demand,—all this sounds as absolute folly in Carlyle's ears. He says:—

"Cut every human relation which has any where grown uneasy sheer asunder; reduce whatever was compulsory to voluntary, whatsoever was permanent among us to the condition of nomadic: in other words, loosen by assiduous wedges in every joint the whole fabric of social existence, stone from stone; till at last, all now being loose enough, it can, as we already see in most countries, be overset by sudden outburst of revolutionary rage."

This upsetting of everything by the outburst of revolutionary passions he regards as the natural consequence, the sure and certain outcome, of such universal enfranchisement.

Another problem bearing on the social well-being of the people, and upon which Carlyle speaks strongly, is that relating to the distribution and allotment of the land of the country. He says emphatically:—

"Properly speaking the Land belongs to these two: To the Almighty God; and to all His children of Men that have ever worked well on it, or shall ever work well on it."

Such views, if meant to be carried beyond the bounds of theory into actual practice, will by most of us be considered as extreme, and as differing but little from those of the French socialist who declared that "property is plunder."

Leaving such fanciful ideas, it will be more profitable to inquire what Carlyle has to say upon some other social questions where his benevolent aspirations are not so likely to be wrecked and broken to pieces by coming against hard facts. We can all agree with what he says on the importance of elevating the people by means of a sound and generous education. Equally valuable are his remarks on the importance of good sanitary arrangements in town and country, to be carried out under the auspices of the State and made imperative on all.

Hear what he says in his own characteristic way on the need for extensive "open spaces" in our large towns for the health and recreation of the working people. It is thus he speaks :—

"Every toiling Manchester, its smoke and soot all burnt, ought it not, among so many world-wide conquests, to have a hundred acres or so of free greenfield, with trees on it, conquered, for its little children to disport in; for its all-conquering workers to take a breath of twilight air in? You would say so! A willing Legislature could say so with effect. A willing Legislature could say very many things! And to whatsoever 'Vested interest,' or such like, stood up, gainsaying merely, 'I shall lose profits,'—the willing Legislature would answer, 'Yes, but my sons and daughters will gain health, and life, and a soul.'—'What is to become of our Cotton-trade?' cried certain Spinners, when the Factory-Bill was proposed; 'What is to become

of our invaluable Cotton-trade?' The Humanity of England answered stedfastly: 'Deliver me these rickety, perishing souls of infants, and let your Cotton-trade take its chance. God Himself commands the one thing; not God especially the other thing. We cannot have prosperous Cotton-trades at the expense of keeping the Devil a partner in them!'"

It thus appears that in all such social arrangements bearing on the comfort and well-being of the people Carlyle is utterly opposed to the lax "let-alone" system of the day, whereby every man is allowed to fight his own battle without Government interfering one way or other. He would have the State step boldly forward and take an active share in regulating all such matters. Interference by the State, he points out, has begun, and it must go on. We have factory inspectors, mine inspectors. Sanitary regulations are needed, which the State alone can enforce. In these and in many other matters he considers interference indispensable; the free action of "supply-and-demand" and of "enlightened egoism" being quite insufficient, without this aid, to promote the welfare and best interests of the community.

CHAPTER XVII.

PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT—ELECTIONS—PUNISHMENT OF SCOUNDRELS—GENERAL REMARKS.

To come to questions which have more of a political than social aspect, though it must be allowed that the two often run into each other and can hardly be distinguished, let us see in the first place what Carlyle has to say on the subject of parliamentary government. Your constitutional Parliament, he contends, is a mere talking machine and nothing more. It will train you to talk, and, what is more, to listen patiently to "unlimited quantities of foolish talk." Those trained in this school, if good for nothing else, are ever ready, on the shortest notice, to utter platitudes without end, "like a hurdy-gurdy on turning of the handle." Such "parliamentary bagpipes," he tell us, he has heard play tunes often enough, to the delight and amusement of the crowd, but to his own inexpressible disgust.

He complains bitterly of the ascendency this gift of the gab has acquired in our public life in this our day. It is, says he, our fatalest misery

that "no British man can attain to be a Statesman, or Chief of Workers, till he has first proved himself a Chief of Talkers. . . . Such a method as this by trial of Talk, for filling your chief Offices in Church and State, was perhaps never heard of in the solar system before." In modern England—

"Of all the organs a man has, there is none held in account, it would appear, but the tongue he uses for talking. Premiership, Woolsack, Mitre, and quasi-Crown: all is attainable if you can talk with due ability. Everywhere your proof-shot is to be a well-fired volley of talk. Contrive to talk well, you will get to Heaven, the modern Heaven of the English. Do not talk well, only work well, and heroically hold your peace, you have no chance whatever to get thither."

In the inverse ratio to this superabundant outflow of empty talk, is the insignificant quantity of actual work done. Your parliamentary machine turns out volumes of talk, but takes no grip of actual work. It is slow in action. In every act of administration it is slow and inefficient. Seven or eight hundred parliamentary talkers, says Carlyle, "are none of the alertest for getting on with business." He misses here the energy and prompt action of a Cromwell, a Frederick the Great, or a Napoleon. Even the Dictator Francia of South America, how marvellously well did he rule, though not

on the lines of constitutional government! In a word, according to Carlyle, government by parliamentary eloquence and "tremendous cheers" will not do. It can neither initiate nor direct to any useful purpose, but must simply fold its hands and content itself with the role of doing nothing handsomely and in a way to please all round. By this means the governor's task is immensely lightened. It is sufficient that he carefully preserve his good humour, with a variation of "fugle-motions" only.

Then as to the whole scheme of parliamentary elections, how futile is it all! Some imagine that if we have the ballot-box and universal suffrage, then we are all right. Not so thought Carlyle. It appeared to him that the mass of people are quite unfit to elect fit men as their representatives. Valethood will choose a valet, not a hero, to represent it in Parliament. It is, says he, eternally true that "Bobus the sausage-maker" will give his vote for one who, in point of intellect and uprightness does not rise above his own level, and who reflects as nearly as possible all his own prejudices and ignorances. So will any number of Bobuses, if multiplied ever so much. This is your problem,—given a world of knaves, how produce an honesty from their united action? This is your problem, not so

easily solved. "It is," says Carlyle, "a distillation, once for all, not possible. You pass it through alembic after alembic, it comes out still a Dishonesty, with a new dress on, a new colour to it."

A prominent feature of Carlyle's political creed is seen in the inflexible rigour with which he would purge society of "scoundrels." Witness his undisguised admiration of "Hero-Grimwold" who, unable to single out the real criminal from a lot of others, seizes upon twenty of them and has them all hanged together. Making all due allowance for mistaken "philanthropy," the result perhaps in some cases of amiable feeling, he contends that "scoundrelism" is not to be cured by rose-water methods. The whole system of making criminals comfortable, of lodging them in pleasant well-ventilated apartments, and feeding them on dainty dishes supplied from taxes levied upon the industrious poor, appears to Carlyle a huge mistake. Instead of showing indulgence to criminals, he would keep up the treadmill and the gallows, applying them rigorously where they are richly deserved. Little sympathy has he for "Mr Hesperus Fiddlestring," who shines on platforms, inculcating universal philanthropy and denouncing capital punishment. No admiration has he for that eloquent individual, who appears so beautiful

to some long-eared people. A world's woes are not to be cured by rose-water. Not by this method, in navigating the ship of the State, shall we ever "get round Cape Horn." Having lost our way, instead of taking to our sextants and such serious methods, "we serve out a double allowance of grog." We keep steering on the old tack, and content ourselves with serving out more copiously what little "aqua-vitæ" may be still on board. This, Carlyle holds, is sheer folly. Sharper methods must be maintained and rigorously enforced. Does the Christian religion prescribe love of scoundrels? On the contrary, he hopes it prescribes a healthy hatred of scoundrels. He holds that hatred of scoundrels, the ineradicable tendency to pay them their due, "is for evermore intrinsically a correct and even a divine feeling in the mind of every man." To see a supreme scoundrel "hung upon the gallows in sight of the people," what a lesson is it to all who witness it! Sermons may be preached and fall lifeless. Here, in the most impressive way, is a divine sermon acted, —a recognition that "Eternal Justice rules the world; that at the call of this, human pity shall fall silent, and man be stern as his Master and Mandatory is!"

It will be seen that in Carlyle's political opinions there is a strong flavour of unmitigated

Toryism. Mingled with this there is also a strong infusion of Radicalism. In the person of "Herr Teufelsdröckh" he describes himself as a "Speculative Radical." And, soon after the publication of the article on "Chartism," he writes these words in his private journal:—

"The people are beginning to discover that I am not a Tory. Ah, no! but one of the deepest, though perhaps the quietest, of all the Radicals now extant in the world."

This may be so. And yet we cannot fail to see that a vein of quiet Conservatism also runs through much that he wrote. He can thus speak in sympathetic tones of the essentially Conservative character of our legislature, truly reflecting herein the same character in our people:—

"The English Legislature, like the English people, is of slow temper; essentially conservative. In our wildest periods of reform, in the Long Parliament itself, you notice always the invincible instinct to hold fast by the Old; to admit the *minimum* of New; to expand, if it be possible, some old habit or method, already found fruitful, into new growth for the new need. It is an instinct worthy of all honour; akin to all strength and all wisdom. The Future hereby is not dissevered from the Past, but based continuously on it; grows with all the vitalities of the Past, and is rooted down deep into the beginnings of us."

In the same tone we find Carlyle speaking in

one of the earlier chapters of the *French Revolution*, where he says:—

"Meanwhile it is singular how long the rotten will hold together, provided you do not handle it roughly. For whole generations it continues standing, 'with a ghastly affectation of life,' after all life and truth has fled out of it: so loth are men to quit their old ways; and, conquering indolence and inertia, venture on new. Great truly is the Actual; is the Thing that has rescued itself from bottomless deeps of theory and possibility, and stands there as a definite indisputable Fact, whereby men do work and live, or once did so. Wisely shall men cleave to that, while it will endure; and quit it with regret, when it gives way under them. Rash enthusiast of Change, beware! Hast thou well considered all that Habit does in this life of ours; how all Knowledge and all Practice hang wondrous over infinite abysses of the Unknown, Impracticable; and our whole being is an infinite abyss, *overarched* by Habit, as by a thin Earth-rind, laboriously built together?"

To the same effect we read that in early life Carlyle expected more from a political "Revolution" than he came afterwards to believe possible. "I thought," he once said in his figurative way, "it was the abolition of rubbish. I find it has only been the kindling of a dunghill. The dry straw on the outside burns off; but the huge damp rotting mass remains where it was.[1]

[1] See Froude's *Life of Carlyle.*

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CARLYLE AS A PREACHER

CHAPTER XVIII.

RELIGIOUS TONE—MORAL VIRTUES—NOBLE AIMS—OVERRULING PROVIDENCE.

CARLYLE was educated for the Church as his profession. This was the vocation in life marked out for him by his pious parents and to which his education at college pointed. Though the design was not carried out to the letter, though he never actually preached from a pulpit, yet he continued persistently to exercise an influence in the same direction through the press. In his books he appears emphatically as a preacher, a preacher both of righteousness and of high religious doctrine.

Observe with what persistent earnestness he inculcates the practical duties of religion. In every page almost of his writings he adjures men in the name of Heaven to be sincere. Against shams of every kind, against quackery, against dishonesty and untruth in every shape and

degree he wages incessant war. Truth, sincerity, this was his gospel, and in preaching it his teaching may be regarded as one long sermon. In like tones he preaches obedience and conformity in all we do to the great law of duty. What is good in the sight of God, that is what Carlyle means by duty, and he insists upon our being guided by this sacred principle under all circumstances and at all hazards. In great things and in small we are to do as God directs, working ever as under our "great Taskmaster's eye." On this point too Carlyle preaches many an eloquent sermon.

Carlyle tries hard to lift his readers above the worship of material interests. He calls upon them to cultivate spiritual aims and be guided by spiritual motives. In burning language he denounces some of the besetting sins of the age, such as the infatuation which deludes so many, the mad endeavour to make money at all hazards and get on in the world, as if this constituted the whole duty of man. There is something nobler, he points out, than this "cash-gospel," something nobler and better. In his view the universe is constituted on quite other principles than that of making money or obtaining money's worth. This lesson he constantly inculcates, and in his glowing words on this text we seem to hear the voice of the Divine Teacher himself.

In harmony with his high moral tone are the more strictly religious doctrines Carlyle taught. Everywhere throughout his writings he upholds the doctrine of an overruling Providence, who is the ultimate agent and by whose controlling guidance human affairs are regulated. Such was Carlyle's firm belief, and he proclaims it in season and out of season. No one can fail to perceive that here too he appears in the attitude of a preacher who follows closely in the lines of Bible truth. We may see how, in the sacred Scriptures, God is always spoken of as the grand ultimate agent. It is not man that achieves success and gains the victory; it is God. This is the great lesson taught by the old Prophets, sung in the song of Deborah, and in the Psalms of David. God is there seen ever present, working according to the counsel of His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. Carlyle follows this style of teaching. Unlike the ordinary teacher of science, who looks at the bare chain of physical causes and effects, and is content there to stop, or the ordinary historian, who confines his attention to human motives, Carlyle looks beyond these, and behind all he sees the Divine Agent visibly at work.

With his firm belief in a Providence who regulates human events, we are not surprised

to find that resignation—absolute submission to God's will—was regarded by Carlyle as the right thing under all circumstances. We see this in various passages in his writings, as, for example, where he refers to resignation as being the distinctive feature of the Mahometan religion, the word *Islam* signifying that, and hints that it constitutes the essence of Christianity itself. In the same tone he writes in his private letters. Thus when writing from London relating his disappointments about *Sartor*, which no publisher would look at, he says submissively—"In all thy ways acknowledge Him." And in his last letter to his father, written in 1832, he says—"On the whole I always return to this. As the great Guide orders, so be it. While I can say *His will be mine*, there is no power on earth or out of it that can put me in fear." Compared with this faith he considered all rituals, liturgies, and mass-chauntings as worthless.

The following extracts may serve to illustrate Carlyle's views on the high doctrine of God's overruling providence. In his *Past and Present* he thus speaks, and in his words is distinctly heard the voice of the preacher:—

"The Maker's Laws, whether they are promulgated in Sinai Thunder to the ear or imagination, or quite otherwise promulgated, are the Laws of God; trans-

cendent, everlasting, imperatively demanding obedience from all men. This, without any thunder, or with never so much thunder, thou, if there be any soul left in thee, canst know of a truth. The Universe, I say, is made by Law; the great Soul of the World is just and not unjust. Look thou, if thou have eyes or soul left, into this great shoreless Incomprehensible: in the heart of its tumultuous Appearances, Embroilments and mad Time-vortexes, is there not, silent, eternal, an All-just, an All-beautiful; sole Reality and ultimate controlling power of the whole? This is not a figure of speech; this is a fact. The fact of Gravitation known to all animals, is not surer than this inner Fact, which may be known to all men. He who knows this, it will sink, silent, awful, unspeakable, into his heart. . . . Such knowledge, the crown of his whole spiritual being, the life of his life, let him keep and sacredly walk by. He has a religion. Hourly and daily, for himself and for the whole world, a faithful, unspoken, but not ineffectual prayer rises, 'Thy will be done.' His whole work on Earth is an emblematic spoken or acted prayer, Be the will of God done on Earth,—not the Devil's will, or any of the Devil's servants' wills! He has a religion, this man; an everlasting Loadstar that beams brighter in the Heavens, the darker here on Earth grows the night around him."

The same doctrine is perhaps still more emphatically taught in the following passage quoted by Mr Froude from one of Carlyle's unpublished manuscripts:—

"Old piety was wont to say that God's judgments

tracked the footsteps of the criminal; that all violation of the eternal laws, done in the deepest recesses or on the conspicuous high places of the world, was absolutely certain of its punishment. You could do no evil, you could do no good, but a god would repay it to you. It was as certain as that when you shot an arrow from the earth, gravitation would bring it back to the earth. The all-embracing law of right and wrong was as inflexible, as sure and exact, as that of gravitation. It well behoves us to reflect how true essentially all this still is: that it continues, and will continue, fundamentally a fact in all essential particulars."

It may be added that Carlyle's faith in a directing Providence went farther than most of us can follow him. He was inclined to believe in a special Providence, which governed all events, however seemingly unimportant and to the eye of man insignificant. These are his words:—

"Some strange belief in an actual particular Providence rises always in me at intervals, faint but indestructible belief, in spite of logic and arithmetic, which does me good."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DIVINE IDEA OF THE WORLD—REVERENCE FOR CHRISTIANITY—GENERAL REMARKS.

THE belief in God's government of the world by inflexible moral laws may be considered the leading article in Carlyle's religious creed. Side by side with it may be placed that other doctrine (if indeed it be entirely different), expressed in the words "The Divine Idea of the World," upon which our author discourses so eloquently in *Sartor Resartus*, and at which he glances also in some of his other writings. According to Carlyle, the world lying before our eyes is the vesture merely or sensuous Appearance of an invisible essence; which invisible essence is God. Thus all Nature is a manifestation or outward emblem of God. So deeply impressed was Carlyle with the importance of this doctrine that he looked upon it as the great message he was called upon to deliver to the world. In a letter to his brother John, written in 1833, he says—"My mind would so fain deliver itself of that 'Divine Idea of the World,' and only in quite inadequate approximation is

such deliverance possible." In one of his private memoranda, written about the same time, he says :—

"Neither fear thou that this thy great message of the Natural *being* the Supernatural will wholly perish unuttered—write it down on paper any way; speak it from thee—so shall thy painful destitute existence not have been in vain. Oh, in vain? Hadst thou, even thou, a message from the Eternal, and thou grudgest the travail of the embassy? O thou of little faith!"

Elsewhere he says—"I get more and more earnest, graver, not unhappier every day. The whole creation seems more and more divine to me, the natural more and more supernatural." Again he says—"The gist of my whole way of thought is to raise the natural to the supernatural." Such and many such utterances dropped from his pen at the time when he was meditating his great work *Sartor Resartus*. We see also what importance Carlyle attached to this doctrine when we find him declaring again and again that the true aim of the man of letters should be to feel in himself, and reveal to others, this "Divine Idea of the World."

The first impression left on the mind after reading Carlyle's thoughts on the "Divine Idea of the World," is that he is speaking of God's omnipresence and active agency in the physical world. But on further reflection it will appear

that he goes beyond this, and that under that expression he includes also God's far-reaching moral government throughout nature and in the affairs of men.

If there is the tone of a preacher in Carlyle's utterances on these high themes of natural religion, so is there also in the profound reverence with which he speaks of Christianity. Thus reverently does he speak :—

"The event at Bethlehem was of the Year One; but all years since that, eighteen hundred of them now, have been contributing new growth to it,—and see, there it stands: the Church! Touching the earth with one small point; springing out of one small seedgrain, rising out therefrom, ever higher, ever broader, high as the Heaven itself, broad till it overshadow the whole visible Heaven and Earth, and no star can be seen but through *it*. From such a seedgrain so has it grown; planted in the reverences and sacred opulences of the soul of mankind; fed continually by all the noblenesses of some forty generations of men. The world-tree of the Nations for so long!"

Again he says :—

"Jesus of Nazareth and the life he led, and the death he died, does it teach thee nothing? Through this, as through a miraculous window, the heaven of Martyr Heroism, the 'divine depth of Sorrow,' of noble Labour, and the unspeakable silent expanses of Eternity, first in man's history disclose themselves."

In another place he says somewhat beautifully :—

"More touching still, there is not a hamlet where poor peasants congregate, but, by one means and another, a Church-Apparatus has been got together,—roofed edifice, with revenues and belfries; pulpit reading-desk, with Books and Methods . . . that a man stand there and speak spiritual things to men. It is beautiful, even in its great obscuration and decadence it is among the beautifulest, most touching objects we can see on the Earth."

In the same vein he thus speaks of the spirit of Christianity. It is not enough, as Zeno taught, to trample the earth with its injuries under thy feet—

"Thou canst love the Earth while it injures thee, and even because it injures thee; for this a greater than Zeno was needed. . . . Knowest thou that 'Worship of Sorrow?' The temple thereof, founded some eighteen centuries ago, now lies in ruins, overgrown with jungle, the habitation of doleful creatures: nevertheless venture forward; in a low crypt, arched out of fallen fragments, thou findest the Altar still there and its sacred lamp perennially burning."

In all this we hear the tone and accents of the preacher.

We may safely say that in his allusions to religious truth Carlyle's tone is uniformly tender and reverent. He seems to feel it is holy ground and to say to himself—"Take thy shoes from off thy feet." Reverence he describes as the highest feeling vouchsafed to man, and

Worship as his supreme excellence. In all this Carlyle appears in the character of an earnest religious man. In his letters to his mother his natural piety often finds expression. They did not always agree in their opinions, but they were both truly religious, though in different ways. In one of these letters he tells his mother that his main object in life was to be useful "in the good old cause." In another letter, when sending to his mother the *Life of Henry Martyn*, he speaks of himself as "a kind of missionary in his way—not to the heathen of India, but to the British heathen, an innumerable class whom he would gladly do something to convert."

It is to be observed that Carlyle's reverent attitude towards Christianity applies to its essential features, and not always to the form and dress in which it appears among men. With his unbounded reverence for the Christian religion in its spirit and essence, he does not always admire the plans and methods adopted by Christian men and women to carry out the objects they have at heart. Very far, for example, is he from applauding the zealous efforts put forth to convert the black man abroad, who is separated from us by wide oceans, while we neglect the white man at our own doors who stands equally in need of conversion. And as

to the controversies, founded too often on incomprehensible subtleties, by which the Christian Church is divided and rent asunder, he has no respect for them, and compares them sometimes to a vain endeavour to define "the colour of the Bishop's nightmare!"

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CARLYLE AS A MAN.

CHAPTER XX.

MOROSENESS—CYNICISM—ARROGANCE—CAUSES OF MOROSENESS, DISCONTENT, AND CYNICISM.

If there was light in Carlyle's words, it cannot be said there was always sweetness also. He was disposed to take a morbid, cynical view of human life. In the low estimate he expresses of human nature, and of the littleness of man's pursuits, his cynicism is of the Diogenes type, biting and contemptuous. Among our own writers he may be compared to Swift, whom he resembles in his moroseness and bitter contempt for human society. That *saeva indignatio* that boiled turbulently in Swift's breast boiled no less turbulently in the breast of Carlyle.

In much that he wrote Carlyle addresses himself to the taste of the dissatisfied, a pretty large class in these times. All who are inclined to speak bitterly of our social, political, and ecclesiastical arrangements will find some echo of

their own thoughts in the writings of Carlyle. See how he lashes whole classes of men, such as the English aristocracy, making no exception! His language here scarcely differs from that of unmitigated slander, and it must go far to shake the reader's confidence in his impartiality and freedom from prejudice in matters of still greater importance.

As for his cynical remarks upon distinguished contemporaries, Carlyle appears to have cultivated the art, not without success, of saying the most biting things possible about them. Coleridge, Sydney Smith, Macaulay, Charles Lamb, and others, all come in for their share of abuse. Even Emerson, with whom he had corresponded for years, and who had done much to win his regard, does not fare much better. The great name of Wordsworth himself does not escape his cynical tooth. That Carlyle should show such a snarling, and one would almost say bitterly envious disposition to nearly all contemporary authors, however able or estimable they might be, is certainly greatly to be regretted, and it cannot fail to lower him in the good opinion of every right-minded man.

Nor is he much more amiable in judging the authors of bygone times, who have had the misfortune to write on the same subject as himself. Nowhere is this more conspicuous than where he

falls foul of the biographers of Cromwell who wrote before his time. Where he is not bitterly cynical he is, to say the least, profoundly censorious, and criticises the faults and shortcomings of such writers with ludicrous exaggeration. Of a certain book which he has occasion to refer to he says:—"It is definable as probably the most chaotic Pamphlet ever written; and in many places, by dint of uncorrected printing, bad grammar, bad spelling, and, in short, of intrinsic darkness in so vivacious a humour, it has become abstruse as Sanscrit." Nevertheless, by dint of great labour and the exercise of much patience, he does succeed at last in gleaning something out of it.

In the same spirit Carlyle hits at the learned professions all round. It must be allowed that the tone in which he speaks of them is extremely harsh, and to a great extent undeserved. It is not the playful humour with which writers like Scott or Addison glance at the characteristic foibles and peculiarities of professional men. Carlyle attacks the professions themselves tooth and nail. There may be a grain of truth in what he says. But he is extreme to mark iniquity. Not content with lancing the sore, he mangles the limb.

Even as a young man Carlyle was noted for his cynical disposition, and it seems, with its

accompanying moroseness, to have grown upon him until he became at last horribly misanthropic. So far did this go that even old college friends, with whom he had been intimate, and with whom he had kept up a correspondence by letter for years, were afterwards shunned and derided, for no fault of their own, but because he himself had changed.

His cynical humour is seen sometimes in the very turn of the expression he uses. Speaking of the Jews who were banished beyond the limits of Abbot Samson's jurisdiction, he says:—"There were many dry eyes at their departure." So it is with some of his quotations, which he applies ironically, warping the words from their true meaning. After pointing out the faults of character in some one, he will end by saying—"No longer seek his merits to disclose." Even his word-portraits not unfrequently betray a cynical disposition, as where he speaks of Cardinal Richelieu with his "mastiff face."

Moroseness and cynicism form such prominent features in Carlyle's moral character that it may be well to illustrate them in greater detail, even at the risk of some repetition. The account he gives of the literary men he met in London in 1825, including such writers as Coleridge, Campbell, and De Quincy, is sufficiently cynical. When he revisited the metropolis in 1831 his

wrath burns still more fiercely against the London literati in general, as will appear from the following extraordinary letter addressed to Mrs Carlyle :—

"Of all the deplorables and despicables of this city and time, the saddest are the 'literary men.' Infandum! Infandum! It makes my heart sick and wae. Except . . . . I have hardly found a man of common sense or common honesty. They are the Devil's own vermin, whom the Devil in his good time will snare and successively eat."

Among the literary men who attracted his attention at this time was Macaulay, and him he thus describes :—"Of Macaulay I hear nothing very good—a sophistical, rhetorical, ambitious young man of talent." Of Charles Lamb the essayist he speaks thus harshly :—"A more pitiful, rickety, gasping, staggering Tomfool I do not know. He is witty by denying truisms and abjuring good manners." His "fraction of humour" Carlyle admits, but does not recognise it as anything remarkable. It is to be borne in mind that these atrabilious utterances dropped from Carlyle's pen at the time when he was searching London through and through for a publisher for his *Sartor Resartus*, and failed to find one.

The same morose cynicism is seen in Carlyle's estimate of those authors who had handled sub- corresponding to those which he himself Look, for example, at the contemp-

tuous way in which he speaks of the biographers of Cromwell. With perhaps one exception he has scarcely a good word to say of any of them, while of most he speaks with extreme contempt. One of the biographers he falls foul of is Heath, whom he uniformly calls "*Carrion* Heath." Mark Noble, another of these biographers, he treats with a little more respect, but by no means with unmixed approval. Of him Carlyle says that he has written a book, "if we must call it a Book, abounding in facts and pretended-facts," showing much research in regard to old leases, marriage contracts, deeds of sale, and the like. In fact, says Carlyle, he has amassed—

"a large heap of evidences and assertions, worthless and of worth, respecting Cromwell and his Connexions, from which the reader, by his own judgment, is to extract what he can."

For, adds Carlyle, Noble himself—

"is a man of extreme imbecility; his judgment, for the most part, seeming to lie dead asleep; and indeed it is worth little when broadest awake. He falls into manifold mistakes, commits and omits in all ways; plods along contented, in an element of perennial dimness, purblindness; has occasionally a helpless, broad innocence of platitude which is almost interesting. A man indeed of extreme imbecility; to whom nevertheless let due gratitude be borne."

In the same cynical spirit he criticises the authorities he had to consult when writing his history of Frederick the Great:—

"Those sad Prussian Repositories, where the grain of perennial, of significant and still memorable, lies overwhelmed under rubbish-mountains of the fairly extinct, the poisonously dusty and forgettable."

Turning to another point, it may be observed that Carlyle takes a very sombre view of human life. To his morbid mind the world appeared to be completely out of joint. It is not the vices only of society that he denounces: he finds fault also with its graces and amenities. There is found in his writings a general growl at many things which by others are considered harmless or even amiable. Thus he speaks with sneering contempt of those who in these days visit picture galleries, and of their hypocritical criticisms upon what they have seen there. In like manner he comes down heavily upon what is called pleasant wit, and upon those who indulge in such ghastly frivolity. "Such grinning inanity," says he, "is very sad to the soul of man. A fashionable Wit, ach Himmel! If you ask which, he or a Death's-head be the cheerier company for me? pray send not him!"

In the same cynical spirit we find him constantly sneering at "gentility." The higher

ranks of society come in for a special share of attention. The higher the rank of those who fall under his censure, the more eager is he to paint them in the darkest colours. Kings and queens he holds up to ridicule, and treats with no more ceremony than if they were ordinary mortals.

It may be observed further that Carlyle indulges in many a dyspeptic sneer at human nature in general, and at mankind in the mass. Man he describes as a mere digesting machine, and sometimes, in old phrase, as a two-legged animal without feathers. The newly enfranchised Parliamentary elector is described as giving his vote along with other "poor, fellow blockheads of mankind." In a letter written in 1851 he thus gives vent to his feelings of disgust and dissatisfaction with the whole human race :—

"Oh, I am sick of the stupidity of mankind. I had no idea, till late times, what a bottomless fund of darkness there is in the human animal. The profoundest Orcus or belly of chaos itself, this *is* the emblem of them."

Still later in life, in a well-known passage, and in a style more forcible than fastidious, he compares human nature to "dog- nature," in its inveterate propensity to run to what is vile on all occasions, and find satisfaction therein.

If any further illustration were needed of

Carlyle's cynical estimate of human nature, it might be found in that old Moslem fable he is so fond of quoting about the "Apes by the Dead Sea." These apes were once men, dwelling on the shores of the Dead Sea, and living there lives of selfish indulgence, regardless of all higher duties. The Heavenly Father, taking pity upon them, sent Moses to instruct them. Him they would not hear. Then was God's anger kindled against them, and they were turned into apes; and apes they remain, destitute of reverence and of all high thoughts, grinning and jabbering all day long. Such, according to Carlyle, are men. Taken in the mass, and with very few honourable exceptions, they are no better than "Dead Sea apes," with their grinning frivolity and aimless lives. This old fable had a peculiar charm for Carlyle, and his frequent allusions to it may serve to illustrate the morose and cynical bent of his mind.

Combined with this moroseness and cynicism there is found in Carlyle a self-assertion amounting to arrogance in the expression of his opinions. He had profound faith in the absolute infallibility of one man, and that man was Thomas Carlyle. There is seen in him a hard positiveness sometimes and overbearing dogmatism, an inclination to beat down opposition and silence all

who differ from him. In conversation with others, as well as in what he wrote, he showed the same imperious temper and unwillingness to be contradicted. A literary lady from America, who met him once or twice, went away with this impression of him deeply imprinted on her mind. She said,—"If you get a chance to remonstrate with him for a moment, he at once raises his voice and bears you down." This feature of his character was naturally displeasing to men of gentler temper and more courteous manners. What offended Jeffrey and many others who were inclined to think well of him was his extraordinary "arrogance"—"a fault," says his very friendly biographer, "of which no one who knew Carlyle, or who has ever read his letters, can possibly acquit him."

We might add, by the way, that extreme querulousness and discontent with his position formed a prominent feature in Carlyle's character. In reading his life we are compelled to feel, however unwillingly, that he could be content nowhere and under no circumstances. In early manhood, while living with the Bullers, and treated as one of the family with every consideration, he became ere long restless and uneasy. One gets tired of his constant complaints of feeling miserable, under circumstan which would have caused no uneasiness to mi

differently constituted. He blamed his position, while the fault lay wholly in himself.

Looking back for a moment at Carlyle's moroseness and cynicism, how comes it, we may ask, that one who was in some respects so superior to most others, whose intellectual endowments were of the highest order, and the purity of whose life has never been called in question, could yet exhibit such an unamiable disposition? It may well excite our surprise. Without attempting to excuse him where he is inexcusable, it may be well to point out some circumstances in his lot which had a tendency to form and foster such a temper, and which, if they do not altogether free him from blame, may at least go some way in extenuating it.

In the first place, it may be observed that the circumstances of his life, in its earlier stages, must have contributed their share in moulding his character. He had early struggles with poverty, and early disappointments. No honourable career was open to him into which he could throw himself heart and soul. The "trade" of teaching opened its arms to him; but he never liked it, and it became more and more odious to him, and intolerable to his high spirit as years rolled on. At college, in the midst of struggles with poverty, he turned his attention first to divinity and then to law, but after a short trial

both were found to be uncongenial to his tastes. After this he aspired to a professor's chair in one of our northern universities, but was baffled in his hopes again and again. All this had a tendency to sour his temper, and he became morose and cynical.

It must be added that his endeavours to make for himself a name in literature met for a long time with very little success. He could not throw his thoughts into a shape that pleased the public. He had not the talent for writing so as to please superficial readers, who require a style easily understood and demanding the least possible exercise of thought. It thus happened that his earliest literary efforts were far from being a success. They brought to their author neither fame nor fortune. Publishers looked askance at him, and declined the article. His *German Romance* lay a drug in the market. His *Schiller* and his translation of *Wilhelm Meister* sold slowly. As for his *Sartor*, over which he had spent years of earnest thought, and from which he expected so much, he sought London through and through to find a publisher for it, and sought in vain. When at last it was published as an act of kindness in *Fraser's Magazine*, the editor, in one of his earliest communications to the author, informed him that not only was it not appreciated by the public, but

that it "excited the most unqualified disapprobation." The *French Revolution* was the first of his works that attracted general attention, yet even it made its way slowly, and for a long time brought no pecuniary benefit to the author. The first whispers of genuine applause came across the Atlantic, wafted on the western breezes. The first remittances, too, came from America, while the author's own countrymen were inclined to button their pockets, and to regard the work with dislike as an incoherent rhapsody. Thus in spite of his desperate efforts to distinguish himself in literature, his hopes were for long doomed to disappointment.

Can we wonder if such disappointments sunk into his soul and soured him against the world! The truth is that, if Carlyle had not been a man of the most dogged resolution, he must have sunk under the accumulated disappointments met with in the earlier part of his literary career, and given up his work in despair. But he persevered with indomitable courage, and neither lost heart nor hope. In a letter to his brother he once said—"The world must be a tougher article than I have ever found it if it altogether beats me." And this is but a sample of what he was always—a man of stubborn unbending resolution.

In addition to the struggles and disappoint-

ments of his youth, we cannot fail to perceive that all his life Carlyle suffered much from ill-health. From early manhood onwards he was a martyr to dyspepsia. He passed sleepless nights, and had to dose himself with drugs which afforded only temporary relief, and left him in the end more miserable than ever. We find his home letters full of complaints about his nervous disorders and general want of health. At the age of twenty-eight he writes thus to his brother—"I want health, health, health! On this subject I am becoming quite furious; my torments are greater than I can bear." In one of his letters to his wife he tells her not to mind what he said in his angry moods, as "it was the mere grumbling incidental to dyspepsia and the load of life." In another place he quotes, as applicable to himself, what some one similarly afflicted once said—"jist plain mental awgony in my ain inside." When delivering his Lectures on Heroes in London, he was thrown into a dreadful state of nervous excitement. After that on Mahomet he thus writes to his mother:—"And now, alas! as the price of a good lecture, my nerves are thrown into such a flurry that I got little sleep last night, and am all out of sorts to-day." At the close of these lectures, nowithstanding the unmistakable signs of approval with which they were received by the audience, he says—"I will not be in

haste to throw myself into such a tumble again. It stirs me all up into ferment, fret, and confusion, such as I hate altogether."

Sorely afflicted with dyspepsia in the body, the malady reached his brain likewise, and from thence overflowed into his writings. His views of life and of the characters of men, including among them some of his best friends, were tainted accordingly, and may be called the views of a dyspeptic. In these moods he had respect for no existing institution and for no living man. Let those who have never been afflicted in this way hold their peace. They little know what a true martyr to dyspepsia has to endure. The disease may not be dangerous. In point of fact it seldom ends fatally. But in its more virulent form it is a kind of living death, turns the blood to gall, and draws a funereal pall over the mind.

CHAPTER XXI.

AFFECTIONATE SIDE OF HIS CHARACTER—AS A SON, AS A BROTHER, AS A HUSBAND—OTHER ADMIRABLE QUALITIES.

AND yet was there not also an affectionate side to Carlyle's character? After all has been said about his moroseness and cynicism, to the members of his own family under the paternal roof he was tender and affectionate, and ready to submit to much self-denial on their account. For his good and pious mother he cherished the strongest filial love. His letters to her, of which many have been printed, are uniformly dutiful, tender, and affectionate. Nor was this all. He was ever sending her presents. Even when a young man at Kirkcaldy he had something to spare out of his scanty income for his dear mother. Now it was a "scarf," now a "shawl," now a "bonnet," that he sent her. Later in life, as we all know, when the first remittances for his *French Revolution* came from America, with characteristic generosity, and when he was himself struggling with poverty, he sent part of it

(a five-pound note) to his mother, telling her quaintly that it was the duty of the kitten to bring a mouse to the old cat.

To his father he was equally generous. In one of his Kirkcaldy letters he says—"My father once spoke of a threshing-machine. If twenty pounds or so will help him, they are quite ready at his service." He showed the same kindness and generosity to his brothers and sisters, doing all he could to help them, and out of his own scanty means supplying money to pay for their education. His brother John in particular he supported at college for years, paying all his expenses, at a time when he could very ill afford it. Then look at his letters to his brothers and sisters. They are all written in an affectionate tone. His letters to members of his own family, particularly those to his mother and his brother John, are beautiful, and present the writer in a very amiable light. As a son and a brother no exception can be taken to Carlyle. He was not only correct and faultless, but abounding in affection. There was a special reason for this, which Carlyle himself explains in characteristic fashion. In a letter to his brother Alexander he says :—

"We are not in danger of forgetting one another. We Carlyles are a clannish people, because we have all something original in our formation, and find there-

fore less than common sympathy from others. . . . . This draws us nearer to one another."

In what light, it may be asked, does Carlyle appear as a husband? If we may judge by the letters that passed between Carlyle and Jane Welsh prior to their marriage it will be seen that he was by no means carried off his feet by the romance of love; neither was she. If the truth must be told, they were scarcely in all respects suited for one another as man and wife. They were perhaps too much alike in disposition. Both were irritable and easily annoyed. Both had sharp tempers. Both had sharp tongues, and were inclined to speak out their mind freely in cutting words. But notwithstanding this, there was common ground of affection between them, and as man and wife they were not unhappy. The published letters show that there was real affection on both sides, and something more than respect or admiration. Let any one read Carlyle's letters to his wife, written in the autumn of 1831 from London, and say whether or not he had a true affection for her. Some of them show a true and deep-seated affection. It is not one or two letters, but many. They are all written in the same tone, and some of them will be found even overflowing with love. It may be said that distance lent enchantment to the view; but that were to examine the matter too

curiously. We cannot but notice that when she was absent from home, in shattered health, his letters to her were kind and considerate. Then look at that letter to her on the death of her mother—with what irrepressible tenderness he writes! On the whole we cannot be mistaken in saying that Carlyle's letters to his wife were kind, and often tenderly affectionate. Nor was this all. As a token of his affection he used regularly, without fail, to buy some little present for his wife on her birthday, were it only a little "card-case," thus putting to shame many a husband among us who has never been accused of coldness and want of heart in his domestic relations.

Nor was the affection wholly on his side. Woman-like, his wife returned it with interest. From some of her letters it would appear that she was full of admiration for her husband, sincerely attached to him, and even dotingly fond of him, however much her sharp tongue might sometimes disguise it. Her chief complaint during their married life was that she saw too little of her husband, and that he was not more of a companion to her. In her bright way she would sometimes say that she had a "husband," but not a "companion."

In point of fact Carlyle had *two wives*. He was married to Jane Welsh, and he was also

wedded to his books—to literature. The latter he loved with a devotion which few have ever equalled. From the glimpses we get of Carlyle it appears that when he had any important literary work in hand he was so wrapt up in it that he could think of nothing else. This, as we may well imagine, interfered greatly with his domestic duties. If Mrs Carlyle was feeling poorly, he would sometimes open the door of her room, look in, and say kindly, "How are ye the day, Jeanie?" Then he would vanish to his library, and she saw no more of him for that day. All this did not indicate any want of affection on his part; it only showed a mind preoccupied, and is not to be set down for unkindness. We may allow that Carlyle, like many other ambitious men, sacrificed in some degree domestic happiness at the shrine of high public aims. Believing that he was instructing the public at large in what they ought to know, he perhaps allowed this to occupy too much of his time. It has been said of Edmund Burke that he gave up to party what was meant for mankind. Carlyle rather reversed this rule, and gave up to mankind what was due to the family circle and to home duties.[1]

[1] Since the foregoing lines were written some interesting early letters of Carlyle, collected with pious care by his niece, and edited in no unfriendly spirit by Mr Norton, have appeared in

It was not exclusively to the members of his own family that Carlyle's affections were drawn out. A friendship of the closest kind subsisted between him and Edward Irving, which continued without interruption for long years in every variety of fortune. After Irving's mind became clouded,—after, so to speak, it became unhinged,—Carlyle did not cease to feel a warm interest in him, and it continued to the last.

But nowhere, outside the home circle, does the innate tenderness of Carlyle's nature appear in a more amiable light than in his warm affection for John Sterling. He, above the rest, was the disciple whom Carlyle loved, his love being probably intensified by the respectful admiration with which the disciple looked up to the master. The two men had much in common. They held sweet counsel together, and each walked in the

print. They clear up some prevalent misconceptions, and tend to show that the mutual affection between Carlyle and his wife was closer and warmer than is generally supposed. That letter of his, written in October 1826, one week before his marriage, is altogether suitable to the occasion, and breathes more of the romance of love on his part than the world had given him credit for. Nor can it be said that Jane Welsh at this interesting juncture was unmoved, and passed on "in maiden meditation fancy free"; for she confesses that she was deeply grateful to her devoted admirer, and that she loved him with her whole heart. Nevertheless, I am inclined to think that the love subsisting between Carlyle and Jane Welsh was never of the all-absorbing Romeo and Juliet type, but rather resembled that between Benedick and Beatrice, as delineated by Shakespeare—a love without much passion, but genuine and true notwithstanding.

light of the other. If any one is inclined to doubt or call in question Carlyle's tenderness of heart, let him read the *Life of Sterling*, and especially the affectionate tribute to the memory of his young friend at the close of the book. Here Carlyle's affection wells out from a full heart. He finds it impossible to tear himself away from the subject, taking it up again and again, so lovingly does it entwine itself round his heart. If any one complains bitterly of Carlyle's cynicism, let him read this *Life of Sterling*, and here at least he will rather blame him for erring on the side of generous affection than of biting cynicism. It might be added that Carlyle's intimate relations with the whole Sterling family show his character to great advantage. With both father and son, and with all the members of the family, he and his lived on the most friendly footing. It is clear they valued Carlyle highly, and that not for his intellectual gifts alone. As for John, how much he was devoted to him, were there no other proof, might be seen in that solemn, farewell letter he wrote in his closing days, when the dark shadows were fast gathering around him, expressing his undying esteem and gratitude for one who had taught him so much.

Observe, moreover, Carlyle's affectionate interest in young men, without number, who

wrote to him for information and guidance. Their letters, it is well known, he was most careful to answer punctually, allowing, as has been well said, no occupation, however urgent, to interfere with what he considered a sacred duty. Nor will it be denied that in these replies he gave wise and wholesome advice, drawn from his own experience, and flowing from a kind heart as well as a clear head. In addition to all this, we have the testimony of one who knew him well, that in the later years of his life, when he had the means in ample measure, he was kind and generous in unobtrusively relieving distress.

We see, then, that Carlyle was not without affection—even tender affection. Without going quite so far as Mr Froude, who contends that, notwithstanding his explosiveness, Carlyle was in reality the most tender-hearted of men, and that "his savageness was but affection turned sour," we may admit that he was far from being so destitute of the milk of human kindness as some would have us believe. His affection cut out for itself narrow but deep channels. It did not flow over a broad surface, but was confined to a few chosen friends. Being concentrated on a few, it was all the stronger on that account. This idea he himself explains in words that cannot be improved. Reporting a

conversation he once had with Edward Irving, he says :—

"I told him that love concentred on a few objects, or a single one, was like a river flowing within its appointed banks, calm, clear, rejoicing in its course. Diffused over many, it was like that river spread abroad upon a province, stagnant, shallow, cold and profitless."

The figure not unaptly describes Carlyle's affection. It flowed within narrow bounds, but was not on that account less intense or genuine.

Some other admirable features which stand out prominently in Carlyle's character may be briefly noticed. Carlyle was a downright sincere man. His integrity was above suspicion. In all his dealings, in all business transactions with his fellow-men, he was upright and honourable to the last degree. No one ever detected in him the slightest deviation from the straight line of rectitude. In his words there was the same integrity, so to speak, the same absolute veracity, whether in what he wrote for the public, or what he said in conversation. No one ever doubted his word. In his writings we read what he says without the shadow of a doubt that he speaks the truth from his heart as he believed it. Mountains of gold would not have bribed him to say, either in writing or conversation, what he did not fully believe.

There was in him, in all his words and actions, a manly sincerity.

Carlyle was emphatically a man of independent mind. It was impossible to move him from a position he had once taken up. Neither fear nor favour was of any avail. Flattery scarcely touched him; and as for opposition, it only confirmed him in his opinions. Like the mountain-oak wrestling with the storm, he only became more firmly rooted in his opinions by any attempt to overturn them. From what he considered the line of duty he could not be swayed by any consideration whatever. He never took up his pen but for what he considered a just cause. He could not plead for that which he had not at heart and with which he was not in full sympathy. It is well known that he would have been welcomed as a writer for the *Times* if he had been a little more amenable to advice, and could have submitted to have his articles revised, and, it may be, pruned of their excrescences. But he would submit to no such rule. If he wrote at all, he must be left at full liberty to express his own opinions in his own way exactly as he thought right. Such was Carlyle.

We may see the impress of Carlyle's character in much that he wrote. He admires in others what he was in himself. See, for example, how

he exalts the virtue of sincerity. If you be sincere, then you are a man after Carlyle's own heart. Every great man, he holds, has a basis of sincerity in him. No man adequate to do anything but is, first of all, sincere and in right earnest about it. All heroic men are at bottom sincere. A deep, great, genuine sincerity is, he says, "the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic." He could not have spoken thus if he had not himself been at heart a sincere man, and an example of what he so admires in others. In like manner we may see his own character reflected in what he says about the rugged independence of Dr Johnson —that stubborn independence and self-reliance which impelled the poor student at Oxford indignantly to pitch away from his door the shoes charitably placed there in the hope that he would accept them, his own being rather the worse of wear. This brave act of pitching away the shoes from his bedroom door charmed Carlyle. He could thoroughly sympathise with it, for it was just what he would himself have done in the same circumstances.

In conclusion, it may be observed that Carlyle's faults, such as he is commonly charged with, lay on the surface. They might be brushed off and leave no stain. They do not affect his intrinsic character, in which rooted integrity, a

strong sense of justice, truthfulness up to the ideal standard, and, in addition to these, true tenderness of heart, were conspicuous features. In the trait of amiability alone he was deficient. He was too earnest and sincere a man to be altogether amiable. Carlyle's faults of character had no taint of duplicity in them. In all his conduct he was open and aboveboard. He never plotted in secret. He never circulated a malicious story about any one. He never betrayed either friend or foe. And, in addition to these negative qualities, he possessed, as has been said, positive virtues of the most admirable kind, among which integrity, truthfulness, sincerity, and independence of mind shone conspicuous. He was, we may say, an inflexibly upright man, of great tenacity of purpose, ever steering right onward as the law of duty directed, altogether fearless of what others might say or do. Perhaps to him might be applied, as fitly as to almost any one in these later times, the words of the Roman poet—

"Justum et tenacem propositi virum
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solida, ...
Si fractus illabatur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinæ."

CRITICAL NOTES.

QUESTIONABLE OPINIONS.

CHAPTER XXII.

PAST AND PRESENT—CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE—POLITICAL STATES—RELIGION OF THE DAY.

ONE of the most questionable opinions held by Carlyle appears in his constant endeavour to exalt the past above the present, whether socially, politically, or religiously. In all these respects he considers past times as greatly superior to the present, and is emphatically "laudator temporis acti."

As regards the social well-being of the people, he holds that the masses, the general public, are in the present day in a much more miserable and degraded position than they ever were before. Now, though he holds this opinion tenaciously, and is never tired of repeating it again and again in his writings, it is extremely doubtful if there is a word of truth in it. It

would be much more correct to say that in our own country, and in all the more progressive states of the world, the social condition of the people now, so far as it differs from the past, differs only for the better. Poverty and incessant toil, and in some cases deep degradation, may abound in the present day, but when were they ever absent from the human family in any country or clime? We may compassionate the hard lot of the labouring millions at this time, especially in large manufacturing towns, where, along with their unceasing toil, they are seen begrimed with smoke, breathing impure air, living in ill-ventilated houses, and almost shut out from the blessed light of day. It is indeed a hard lot and deserves our fullest sympathy. But we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that similar evils, or far worse, afflicted the toiling millions in ruder, more ignorant, and less peaceful times.

So far does Carlyle carry his admiration of the social condition of the people in past times that he finds something praiseworthy even in the slavery and serfdom that then prevailed, when Gurth, the born thrall of Cedric the Saxon, if he lived with a brass collar round his neck and got cuffs, did also get some "pork parings" from the hand of his master. Gurth in slavery was, according to Carlyle, happier than Gurth a

freeman. So thought not Gurth himself, if we may believe the author of Ivanhoe, who here doubtless reflects the general opinion, and describes with his usual accuracy the genuine feelings of the human heart.

In casting a glance over the barbarous ages Carlyle winks hard at the sufferings endured by the subject masses. He sees only the barbaric pearl and gold, and not the abounding poverty and wretchedness and despair. But Carlyle's accuracy did not extend in this direction. Instead of examining the matter inductively, collecting facts by statistical methods, and drawing from them sound conclusions, he makes a dash at the subject and paints a picture conformable to his own fanciful views. He shuts his eyes to the prevailing evils of the past, taking no notice of the hewers of wood and drawers of water in past times,—of the many hardships under which the people groaned, the widespread poverty, the famines and desolating wars,—evils from which there was no escape, and which far exceeded anything they have to endure in any civilised country at the present time.

Carlyle appears to have fixed his attention too exclusively on the thriftless and shiftless classes of the present day, who are found in great numbers shut up in what he calls our "idle

Workhouses"—classes that exist and are doomed to misery in all states of society and in every country under the sun. But has he opened his eyes sufficiently to the enormous number, outside of this thriftless class, of well-to-do working men and women in the present day in our own country, the enormous number of energetic workers who by steadiness and industry and honourable conduct have risen to a position of respectability and comfort, in many instances to easy circumstances, and even to affluence, as master-workmen, as foremen, and superintendents in their various degrees, in these great industrial ages! In truth Gurth, the born thrall of Cedric the Saxon, had he lived in our day, would, by his energy, promptitude, and loyalty to duty, have risen to a high position, might have become a master-workman, a capitalist, a millionaire, and, instead of getting cuffs and a moderate share of "pork parings," might have lived in ample abundance upon the best beef and mutton that the world can produce.

Nothing has been said of the improvement of machinery in various departments, of the railways and telegraphs of recent times, which, with their other advantages, have opened a career for so many, and lifted them above the drudgery of common labour. Nothing has been said of the vast extension of commerce, of manufactures,

and of all mercantile transactions in our day, which has not benefited the great capitalist alone, but has permeated through all ranks of the working population, and offered honourable occupation and the prospect of a competency to countless numbers who, under less favourable circumstances, would have been living on the brink of semi-starvation. The capitalist and the manufacturer cannot stand alone. They must have others who work under them, and who share in their success. No doubt there are still multitudes of poor people in the land. The poor ye shall have always with you. But it is not true that in the present times the rich man is daily becoming richer and the poor man poorer. It is only true that the poverty of the latter is more conspicuous, and stands out more prominently to view by being placed in contrast to the surrounding prosperity, just as darkness is more visible when contrasted with the light.

I have met with those who have spent twenty or thirty years abroad, and after their return home have revisited the scenes of their youth. What did they find? They found that in that comparatively short period a great change had taken place, a great advance in the physical comfort and well-being of the general population. The men and women and children were better clad than they were before, and lived

upon daintier if not more wholesome diet. The houses recently built were of a better type than the old, with two stories instead of one, with larger windows and doors, and with slated instead of thatched roof. All this indicated a decided improvement in the means and in the comfort of numbers of the people, which was not belied by the equally conspicuous improvement in their manners and self-respect.

If we look from the social to the political state of society, here too we see Carlyle's undue preference of the past over the present. What Carlyle mourned over was the decay of personal power in the sovereign, exercised in an autocratic manner over a subject people who submitted with passive obedience. The barbarous ages, with their tyranny and oppression, he vastly preferred to our own times. As for constitutional government and representative institutions, it would be using too mild language to say he has no good word to say of them. He girds at them unmercifully. Our House of Commons is our national "Palaver." He treats it with bitter contempt, as he does all who distinguish themselves in that arena, be they Whig or Tory. Few will deny that in all this Carlyle looks with a jaundiced eye, and plays the part of a cynical observer rather than of a wise teacher.

Then observe how Carlyle underrates the

present in comparison with the past as regards religion. He talks as if religious faith no longer dwelt among men, but lay buried under baleful atheisms and mammonisms. We must contend, on the contrary, that religious faith still lives and flourishes on the earth in full activity, a faith less superstitious but not less real than what has prevailed in any former age.

It is a favourite notion of Carlyle that the "primitive man" was a very religious being, and that the younger generations of the world were far more alive to religious impressions than we are in these degenerate times. No one will pretend to deny that the sentiment of religion, particularly in its aspects of awe and abject terror, prevailed extensively in primitive times. So powerful and beneficial was its influence that it may well be doubted if society could have been held together, or that man could ever have emerged from the savage state without its benign influence. All this may be conceded. But religion did not die with the primitive man. On the contrary, it has lived through all stages of society, and exercises its benign influence still,—no less powerfully, though in a different form and under different symbols from what it did in the rudest times. It is not now a grovelling superstition, leading to bloody sacrifices; but it still leads to self-sacrifice and

heroic effort, and exercises among all ranks a more invigorating and elevating influence than it ever did before.

There can scarcely be a doubt that Carlyle greatly underrated the power of religion in the present day, and the vast influence it exercises over the community at large. Let any one enter a church, almost any church of any communion, in these our days, and see with what attention the assembled congregation listen to the words of the preacher dwelling earnestly on sacred themes! Let him mark with what touching sincerity they join in singing the praises of the Redeemer, as in that noble hymn that breathes the very spirit of Christianity—"Rock of Ages, cleft for me," and he will confess that religious faith is not a mere thing of the past, but that it still exists among us in all its power. Let him listen to those solemn Psalms of David, such as that one—

> "O send Thy light forth and Thy truth,
> Let them be guides to me,"

or to that wilder and more plaintive strain—

> "Lord, bless and pity us,
> Shine on us with Thy face":

let him listen to those breathings of the soul in social worship, and joined in by the whole congregation, and he must have lost all belief in the power of the human voice faithfully

to translate the feelings of the heart, if he thinks them other than genuine and sincere. If Carlyle in his later years had joined more in social worship, he must have felt that there is still faith among men,—a faith more pure and enlightened, more spiritual but not less genuine, than what prevailed in barbarous times.

Only a few examples have been given of hymns and spiritual songs which we constantly hear sung with an earnest and true heart. Were other examples needed, they might be multiplied to any extent. We might take that one beginning—

"Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee,"

or that other hymn—

"My faith looks up to Thee."

Or take that simple song, so well suited to the feelings of the young, but to which even the old cannot listen without emotion—

"There is a happy land
Far, far away."

In all such strains the feelings are touched of old and young alike, and they unite in singing them with melody in their hearts. The spiritual truths unfolded in such lines may not so forcibly address the intellect, but they impress the heart and are at once soothing and elevating, at once the fruit of faith and the food on which

it lives. We may rest assured that such breathings of the soul have given and still give, in our congregations and in our private worship, strength and comfort, hope and joy to many a believing heart. Carlyle's views on this subject are hard and relentless, and, as we believe, utterly unsound.

Look also at the great number of religious projects and schemes of our time supported by freewill offerings given with a generous hand. Look at the liberal contributions freely given for all charitable and religious purposes. What lies at the root of all this charity? It is faith. After making due allowance for mixed motives in some instances, we may surely believe that a large surplus remains offered in humble faith from a sincere and devout heart. Here, in these religious organisations so liberally supported, have we not another clear proof that there is still faith on the earth, and indeed that it is more widely diffused now than it ever was at any former period. Some are even inclined to say that instead of there being too little, there is too much religious faith in the present day, when it is seen that every vagary and eccentricity is received with favour and meets with reward in many quarters, if only it wear the garb of religion.

Certain it is that the state of religion in

Christendom in our own times, however far from perfect, may compare favourably with what it has been in any former age. The Church in the present day, in all her communions, is doing a great and good work, and is fulfilling her sacred mission in a way to excite our admiration, and far more fitted to fill the heart with joy than with any lower feeling.

While Carlyle is blind to the blessings of religion at this time, while its presence with all its nameless charities and hallowing influences is felt by every one else, what does he propose as a substitute? He would bring back the barbarism which overspread the earth in primitive times, when almost every spark of religion was extinguished and smothered in darkness. If he takes away his eyes for a moment from those barbarous ages and looks for religion in times more recent, he fixes his gaze upon the period of the Crusades and that of the Puritan insurrection. No doubt there was a wild outburst of religious enthusiasm at those periods, and religious enthusiasm is always respectable even when it runs to excess and is mingled with much base alloy. There is no lack of religious enthusiasm in the present day, but fortunately it is a more subdued and better regulated enthusiasm than what prevailed in ruder times.

Carlyle is mistaken, completely mistaken, in supposing that the religion of our day has no life in it. It requires little experience to be convinced that there is a living religion among us, evinced by many in all ranks of society, not only by words but by works. It is no fossil; it is an active principle that pervades the life and thoughts of many in every rank and degree. It is performing now as ever a good work in the world, relieving distress, comforting the heavy laden, pointing to Heaven. To many, to very many, our religion is still a great "unquestionability." It may not have been so to Carlyle, or to minds constituted like his, but it is no less true. To compare the superstition of barbarous times to a religion like ours seems too ridiculous. Had Carlyle ever lived among a barbarous or semi-barbarous people he would have been thoroughly disenchanted. A little experience would have convinced him that there was no religion there worthy of the name; that the habitual spiritual characteristic was religious torpor; and that, when occasionally galvanised into life at the great festivals, it was apt to run into the wildest excesses and assume forms the reverse of edifying.

There *is* faith on the earth in our time. We could not do without it. It is the breath we breathe, the very element in which we live.

Like an ocean, it spreads from heart to heart and purifies them by its presence. Men of a sceptical turn of mind must not question the living faith of others, who may be less intellectual, but are not less sincere. The bulk of people do not critically examine the grounds of their faith. They believe with the heart, they see with the eye of faith, and that is enough. They do not seek for any scientific basis of their belief. Those spiritual hopes and yearnings of love and gratitude which elevate and ennoble them are too sacred to be reasoned about.

The sentiment of religion is ineradicable, and accompanies man in all stages of civilisation, varying in form and keeping pace with his intellectual condition and the circumstances of his life. In all the more civilised countries of Europe there has been an advance in later times. The social condition of the race has been elevated and their tastes refined. Religion has partaken of this general improvement. It has become purer and more suited to the tastes of intelligent men, purer and more refined, but not less real. To this Carlyle appears to have been blind. When Milton in his old age, mourning over his loss of sight, describes his eyes as rolling in vain and finding no dawn—

> "So thick a drop serene hath quenched these orbs,
> Or dim suffusion veiled"—

so was it with Carlyle's vision in this particular sphere. He saw no light, and yet the sun of religion was shining not the less, and warming the hearts of millions with its cheering beams.

So far as to the alleged superiority of past times over the present, in which there is every reason to think Carlyle is wholly mistaken. There is not a particle of evidence to show that either socially, politically, or religiously we in this age are in a worse position than those who have gone before us. On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that in all these respects we in this age stand on a higher level and occupy a better position than our forefathers did. Very few will be inclined to doubt that Carlyle exalts the past far above what it deserves, and underrates the present in a corresponding degree, and that the strong words of Shakespeare may be applied to him in their full force—

> "O thoughts of men accurst,
> Past and to come seem best,
> Things Present worst."

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOCIAL QUESTIONS — THE LAND QUESTION — STATE ORGANISATION OF LABOUR—THE LEARNED PROFESSIONS—POLITICAL QUESTIONS.

In his character as a social and political reformer Carlyle is not always seen at his best. On many questions that come before him he cannot be considered a safe guide. If we have reason to admire the shrewdness of his glance, we are not struck in the same degree with his impartiality and breadth of view. On some points we must consider him as very one-sided, and disposed to found positive conclusions on a very narrow basis of facts.

One of the opinions he holds is that the land of any country belongs to these two—to God Almighty and to those who work upon it. Such an opinion is terribly democratic—nay, destructively democratic. Carry it out in practice and a fatal blow is struck at the right of private property, one of the main pillars, if not the chiefest among them all, on which society is founded and organised. In what age, we may ask, or in what country have

such views, implying a community of goods, ever been carried out to a successful issue? If small communities have ever been started on such principles, have they ever prospered in the long run? It may safely be said, Never. Such small societies, requiring much tender nursing from the first day of their existence, never outgrow their infancy. They remain feeble to the end, and at last melt into the more robust communities around them, founded on far other principles. The idea of building up a society which shall bear the wear and tear of time, rooting itself more firmly in the ground the longer it lives, is perfectly Utopian, and that such a vigorous mind as that of Carlyle should have entertained it for a moment may well excite our surprise. Experience has proved that the most enduring basis for society is the possession of property, which a man shall guard as he would guard his life itself. When this principle is flung away, others of the sentimental kind are found flimsy and inadequate and unable to bear the strain put upon them by the weakness and vices of human nature.

Turning to another point, it may be observed that Carlyle takes up with enthusiasm the idea of the State organising labour on a large scale by means of "Captains of Industry" properly selected. The whole passage treating on this

theme, particularly as it is set down in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, is interesting from its fervid glow, and as evidence of the writer's humane sentiments. But as to the views propounded, we are ready to ask—Are they anything more than a dream incapable of realisation? How the state is to conduct prudently so large a business is not explained. How and in what proportion the wages of labour are to be distributed among the operatives under these "Captains of Industry" does not clearly appear, but we are led to surmise that the weak and the strong, the skilful and the unskilful, the idle and the industrious, the vicious and the prudent, would share and share alike. What would the end of all this be? Would it not be utter disorganisation? Under such a system the energies of the individual would wither, and instead of a golden age of happiness for the working-classes their misery would be increased tenfold.

On the whole, we cannot but regard Carlyle's views on such semi-social semi-political questions as altogether visionary. No society founded in that way could last. The wear and tear of human interests would surely shatter it. If men could be universally drilled into habits of industry, sobriety, and unselfishness, there might be hope. It might then be possible to drill whole communities into industrial regiments,

with no deserters and no stragglers among them. But is it not a fact that in every community there will always be a lazy class, a dissolute class, a migratory class, who will refuse to be so drilled by your "Captains of Industry"? These lawless classes have existed in every human society in all periods of history; and they will continue to exist and act as a disturbing influence till human nature is wholly changed, and we all become angels instead of men.

Turning for a moment to another important point connected with our social arrangements, it is not easy to sympathise with Carlyle in his hostility to the learned professions. He takes a one-sided view of them, fastening upon their weak points only, as if these constituted their substance, and were not merely excrescences growing out of what is strong and vital in them. What he blames in the learned professions is their "speciosity." To his morbid mind they are, one and all, tainted with quackery, so that no honest man can enter them and preserve his sincerity. According to Carlyle it is not of medicine alone that this can be said. It is equally true of the other learned professions. They are all tarred with the same stick. In order to succeed and rise to eminence in any one of them, a man must first of all lay aside his integrity. It must be confessed that in these

matters Carlyle is hard to please. He looks for perfection, and does not find it. His opinions are violent in the extreme, and have all the appearance of being the outgrowth of disappointed ambition. One can dimly imagine to oneself what Carlyle's opinions would have been had he himself been an honoured member of any of the professions he so vilifies! His views, there can be little doubt, would have greatly changed, and instead of a bitter satire we might have had from his pen an eloquent eulogium upon them.

Carlyle's views on many purely political questions are equally unsound. It is too late in the day to raise a hue and cry against representative institutions—a form of government to which all nations incline as they rise in wealth and intelligence. As well strive to drive back the waves of the sea as oppose this tendency. Knowledge is power, and wealth also is power. When the people of any country possess these in rich abundance, they will not be content unless they have a share of political power also. To deny them this would be vain as it would be unreasonable.

Carlyle mourns over the decay of personal power in the sovereign, and shuts his eyes to the possibility of that personal power being abused. He would take us back to the Middle

Ages, nay, beyond them, to a savage state of society, where the mass of the people had no rights but the right to obey, and were kept in complete subjection under the heel of a despotic ruler. His ideal sovereign is a man of strong will, who carries everything before him by sheer force, who pursues his object with relentless decision, without much regard to the means employed, be they just or unjust. Let him wade through slaughter to a throne, he is no less a true hero in Carlyle's eyes.

Sooth to say, in his admiration of strong characters Carlyle has no place for the Christian virtues. If there be any room for the Christian hero, he comes before us in strange guise, like the bishop of the Middle Ages mounted on a war-horse and clad in mail, or like Cromwell in later times, booted and spurred, and with a sword by his side, hot in assault, hot in pursuit, and giving no quarter to his enemies.

It is a maxim dear to English law: Better that ten guilty persons should escape punishment than that one innocent person should perish. Not so thought Carlyle. He brings forward for our admiration that remarkable "Hero-Grimwold," who seizes upon twenty individuals in the hope that the real culprit is among them, and has them all hanged together. There they are, each at the end of a hempen rope, dangling

in the air and cutting strange capers, much to the satisfaction of our "Hero-Grimwold"!

Carlyle has no fancy for the scheme of universal suffrage as a means of electing members of Parliament. He thinks that votes should be weighed instead of being counted; but how that delicate operation of weighing votes is to be accomplished he does not precisely say. His reasoning on the folly of having a great number of voters when a few would suffice and serve the purpose better, may be compared to that of the Caliph Omar, who caused the library at Alexandria to be burnt to ashes. When urged to save this magnificent collection of books, the like of which was not at that time to be found elsewhere in the whole world, Omar replied,—

"If these writings of the Greeks agree with the Koran, they are useless and it is unnecessary to preserve them; if, on the contrary, they disagree with the Koran, they are pernicious and ought certainly to be destroyed."

So, according to Carlyle, if under the scheme of universal suffrage the promiscuous multitude of voters agree with the few wise men among us, they are superfluous and may be set aside as useless; but if, on the contrary, they disagree, they are pernicious and ought certainly to be suppressed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

INADEQUATE APPRECIATION OF CONTEMPORARY TALENT — SYDNEY SMITH — MACAULAY — LYELL — THE NOVELIST—THE PARLIAMENTARY ORATOR.

It may be observed that there appears to be a narrowness of view, a want of breadth and impartiality, in Carlyle's estimate of contemporary authors. This is seen, for example, in the snappish way he speaks of Sydney Smith. To the good sense, clear style, and lively wit of that writer Carlyle was completely blind. This is the more surprising as he and Sydney Smith had much in common. They were both equally enemies of cant, exposing it indeed in a different manner,—the one coming down upon it stormfully, as if with a sledge-hammer, the other pricking it with a sharp rapier,—but each doing his work well, though in a style suited to different tastes. Both, too, had warmly at heart the improvement of society, and discussed social questions with a view to that. They rose equally by strenuous exertion from obscurity to fame and fortune, so that of both it might be said, *ipse faber meae fortunae.* And yet of

one thus accomplished, Carlyle could speak contemptuously, both as regards his intellectual and moral character. His wit was no wit at all, and as to his heart he was "seemingly without soul altogether." Sydney had a soul, only it was moulded differently from that of Carlyle. If not so serious it was less morose, quicker and more playful in its sallies, but no less earnest and no less sincere than that of Carlyle himself.

One cannot but think there must have been some secret cause for this dislike. Was it that the seriousness of Carlyle's nature could not bear light wit or anything approaching to it? Or are we to seek for the cause in Sydney's habit of holding up to ridicule those dyspeptic views of society in which writers like Carlyle indulge, and even of throwing ridicule on dyspepsia itself (a malady with which Carlyle was sorely afflicted), as arising in the main from the state of the stomach? Tell me, says he, "thou humble imitator of Job, on what thou hast dined." Such language must have been gall and wormwood to Carlyle, and no wonder if he was inclined to retaliate, and declare that the man who could write thus had no soul. However this may be, few will be inclined to think that he gauged Sydney Smith correctly, or estimated at their true value the qualities of

head and heart that adorned that witty, clear-headed, and estimable man.

Nor can we see without surprise the very inadequate estimate he formed of Macaulay, as a writer and historian. Of his *History of England*, then recently published, Carlyle thus records his private opinion in his journal:—

"Literary world much occupied of late with Macaulay's *History*, the most popular history-book ever written. Fourth edition already, perhaps within four months. Book to which four hundred editions could not lend any permanent value, there being no depth of sense in it at all, and a very great quantity of rhetorical wind and other temporary ingredients, which are the reverse of sense."

Not one in a thousand who have read Macaulay's *History of England* will be inclined to endorse Carlyle's poor opinion of it.

The same narrowness of view is seen in his estimate of another distinguished author of the period, who writes on a different subject. Of Lyell's *Principles of Geology* he can thus speak: "Alas! this morning I am reduced to 'Lyell's Geology,' a twaddling, confused, ill-writing man." Is there any other man of the many who have read Lyell's *Principles of Geology* who will agree with this criticism? Few can read the book without obtaining a deeper insight into the great subject on which it treats, or

without admiration of the lucid style of the author, and of his large views and accurate information ranging over a wide field of thought. There is absolutely no "twaddle" in the book, but, instead of that, much freshness. And there is no confusion of thought, for the author is fully master of his subject and arranges his materials in the most admirable order. That a writer like Lyell, who studied nature in its geological aspects so carefully, founding his conclusions on a firm scientific basis, should not have commanded the respect of Carlyle, may well excite our surprise.

When we come across these unjust criticisms (and the same inadequate appreciation is seen in his cynical remarks on his distinguished contemporaries generally) we can only regret that an author, in many respects of such distinguished merit, and so much entitled to our respect, should have descended so low from his proper sphere. We can only regret that he could at any time, and were it only for moments of his life, be so untrue to his better self, and that, among his great qualities, he did not also possess that useful one of being able to "consume his own smoke."

This narrowness of view is seen also in the low estimate Carlyle formed of certain branches of literature which have always held an honoured place in the opinion of every one else. Thus,

for example, he speaks most disparagingly of the work of the popular novelist. He regarded novel-writing as a species of "lying." But surely truth severe may sometimes be in fairy fiction dressed, in order thereby to please and attract attention! The most wholesome instruction may be conveyed by that means, just as the wisest lessons may be taught through the fable and the parable. They, too, may be considered as a kind of "lying." But they are not the less instructive on that account. As there is a truth of poetry above that of history, so is there a truth in the novel which may be considered above that of bare biography, for it is truth belonging, not to the outward form of the narrative but to its spirit and essence. Carlyle had evidently read Scott's *Old Mortality*, and he might have found there, in the picture of "Ailie," the old housekeeper, a sketch as true to nature as if it had been copied literally from an actual human being. Or take the *Antiquary* by the same author, which it is evident Carlyle had also read: where shall we find a character delineated in truer colours than that of the old Blue-gown, Edie Ochiltree? The man may not, historically speaking, have lived on this earth, but he is a true type of many who have actually lived, and in him we have depicted in indelible characters a class belonging to bygone times,

and now revived by the magic pen of a great novelist, not for our amusement only but for our instruction as well.

Of Sir Walter Scott's work, when the great novelist was drawing near the close of his career, Carlyle writes down these words in his journal: "What are his novels—any one of them? Are we wiser, better, holier, stronger? No. We have been amused." Many will differ from this estimate, and be ready to confess that from Scott's novels they have gained not only amusement but the wisest instruction likewise. In his essay too on Scott, many will be inclined to think that Carlyle gives most grudging and inadequate praise to so great a writer. His "manliness" Carlyle admits, but does he do justice to his knowledge of human nature, to his wonderful power as a portrayer of character, to the vigour and fertility of his imagination, or to that beautiful "unconsciousness" which distinguishes him as a writer? His character as a whole, and the full extent of his genius, Carlyle was far from duly appreciating.

It may appear strange that, with his bad opinion of the novelist, Carlyle tried hard to write a genuine novel himself. As a preparation for the task he carefully perused the best novels in our own language, and also those composed by French, Italian, Spanish, and German authors.

All would not do. After some vain attempts he found that he had no talent for that kind of composition, and his poor novel was at last committed to the flames. Whether this failure on his part had any influence in warping his views we cannot say. Perhaps the grapes were sour. However this may be, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the novel is the pride of our literature at the present time. With the spread of education among all classes its influence has increased enormously of late years, and we may safely say it is the best means that has ever been invented for diffusing entertaining, and at the same time useful, knowledge among high and low, learned and unlearned, old and young alike.

Look again at Carlyle's most inadequate appreciation of moral and intellectual qualities when they happen to be displayed in the arena of Parliament. His description of the parliamentary orator as a mere talking machine, a "vox et preterea nihil," places before us a character sufficiently contemptible. But where is such a character to be found? It is a mere phantom of Carlyle's brain, and exists nowhere else. Mere fluency of speech is not now and never has been, in this country, the only means by which to attain a distinguished place in parliamentary life. The tongue is not the sole instrument by which a man makes a position for

himself. Behind the tongue there must be brain power, without which any amount of flimsy talk will fall flat on the ear of our House of Commons and earn for its author only the distinction of being an intolerable bore. No one can occupy so much as a respectable place among his peers in Parliament unless he have force of mind and character far above the average; while to shine there and rise to a position of dignity and influence requires intellectual gifts of the highest order. In point of fact we see that those who distinguish themselves in Parliament possess qualities which would have enabled them to rise to eminence in any pursuit, if they could have devoted undivided attention to it, undisturbed by other cares. Even as it is, and with his attention so much engaged in other pursuits of absorbing interest, the eminent parliamentary debater of our day is seldom found wanting when called upon to discuss before a public audience questions outside the sphere of politics. Take such a subject as education, well worn as it is, and there will be found among our prominent parliamentary debaters those who will handle it with a depth and freshness which may well excite the envy of teachers and professors who have studied the subject all their lives and given to it the best of their time and attention.

NOTES ON CARLYLE AS A HISTORIAN.

CHAPTER XXV.

DEFINITION OF HISTORY—CARLYLE COMPARED WITH OTHER HISTORIANS.

You hear it sometimes said that Carlyle is the greatest historical genius that Britain has produced. There is surely reason to doubt the correctness of this opinion. What do we understand by a historian? Is it one who is laborious in collecting facts bearing upon the period he describes and upon those who played a leading part in it? In this respect Carlyle may be considered equal to any historian Britain has produced,—to any historian that ever lived. But if the historian is one who, in addition to accuracy and painstaking care in collecting facts, gives us moreover a connected narrative of events expressed in clear language, who introduces no extraneous matter, who writes throughout calmly and dispassionately, and with a certain dignity

suitable to his subject, rising to eloquence when the occasion demands it and never sinking very low,—in these respects Carlyle cannot be held up as a model historian.

What will generally be accepted as a true definition of history is expressed by Dryden in these words. He says, "The laws of history, in general, are truth of matter, method, and clearness of expression." Truth of matter is justly placed first; and in this quality all will admit that Carlyle excelled, though not perhaps in a greater degree than some other historians that might be named. As regards method, it is not so clear that Carlyle possessed this quality of a good historian. His facts, picked up from all quarters and indicating great research and a wide range of reading, are often presented in heaps without order or arrangement; while his lengthy introductions, frequent digressions, and rapid leaps from one subject to another add to the confusion and leave the reader in a state of bewilderment. As regards clearness of expression, Carlyle can be clear enough when he likes, but he is not in this respect uniform and consistent, while his language is too often marred by uncouth clumsiness and is destitute of that grace that sits so well on the accomplished historian.

Giving all due praise to Carlyle for the possession of many high qualities as a historian,

it would be unjust to place him above our Humes, and Robertsons, and Gibbons, or to say that he eclipses them all and throws them completely into the shade. If for painstaking research and acquaintance with the minutest details we must give Carlyle high praise, we can hardly in this respect place him above Gibbon, while we look in vain in his pages for that continuous stream of clear narrative and that natural development of events, for that sustained dignity of thought and expression, that imperial majesty, if we may say so, which distinguishes the historian of the decline and fall of the Roman empire. Or, if we single out another of the illustrious trio above named, —the one with whom Carlyle stands in greatest contrast,—it will be allowed that Hume is less exact in minute fidelity here and there. Well-informed on essential points, he sketches with a freer hand. In minute detail Carlyle is superior to him; and it is the fashion of the day to lay peculiar stress on that kind of information. I do not know that in this respect Carlyle is surpassed by any historian. But where shall we find in his pages that clear narrative, that ease, and those inimitable graces of style which make Hume's history a book to be read over and over again with ever fresh delight!

Nor is it altogether superfluous to point

out the impartial fairness of our three great historians of the last century in their estimate of one another, which is in striking contrast with the surliness of Carlyle when speaking of those writers who had laboured in the same field with himself. Gibbon praises in Hume the inimitable graces of his style; while Hume praises in Gibbon the dignity of his expression, the depth of his matter, and the extensiveness of his learning. Equally flattering was the estimate each formed of Robertson, and which he fully reciprocated. With an excess of modesty, Gibbon considered both Hume and Robertson as superior to himself, and as models for his imitation. Surely such amiability is far more commendable, exhibits a finer temper and more unprejudiced mind, than the savage surliness of Carlyle toward those historians who preceded him in telling the story of Cromwell and of Frederick.

If we compare Carlyle with historians who wrote in his own day, let it be with Hallam and Macaulay. Both are eminent in a high degree, combining solidity of matter with a vigorous and correct style. They were not less laborious in research than Carlyle, and both had an aptitude for marshalling facts and forming clear statesmanlike opinions of which he was incapable. It is true of Hallam that he writes history with-

out a grain of prejudice or passion; and if the same in every particular cannot be said of Macaulay, he errs in this respect not more than Carlyle.

As a historian it is difficult to suppose that Carlyle will find, or that he deserves to find, many imitators, except in the one point of conscientious accuracy in collecting facts and placing them before the reader in chronological order. In other respects it is not well to set him up as a model for imitation. There is no occasion for elevating him high over the heads of other historians in our own or other lands, who have written on a different plan, and in a style better suited to the taste and comprehension of readers in general.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON CARLYLE AS A HISTORIAN.

It has been pointed out as characteristic of Carlyle's historical method that he usually takes a wide preliminary survey and indulges in lengthy introductory remarks before entering upon his immediate subject. This characteristic is seen conspicuously in his *Cromwell.* After overhauling the biographies previously published of that remarkable man, most of which he handles very roughly, giving the reader plainly to understand that next to nothing in the way of authentic information was known about his hero until he himself took the subject in hand, he then traces with extraordinary minuteness the family history of the Cromwells, giving a circumstantial account of Oliver's family and kindred both in the direct and collateral line. There is nothing so minute of authentic information respecting any one of them as not to be thought worthy of notice. If an uncle of Oliver lived in a house "with ditch and painted pailing round it," down it goes.

Then, when the author does at length break ground upon the story of Cromwell himself, he thinks it needful to describe with extreme minuteness the places where he resided in the earlier part of his life, long before he became a prominent figure as a public man. Far be it from me to say that such information is of no use. These minute details do help us in some measure to realise the man. They serve to throw some obscure light on his character. The danger is that they may be dwelt upon at too great length, until the book in these earlier pages becomes absolutely tedious and unreadable. Many will feel that Carlyle has erred in this direction.

Nor does it appear to be absolutely necessary in the introduction to such a work for the author to acquaint the gentle reader with the unparalleled difficulties of his task,—with the seas of "bilge-water" he has had to cross in his investigations, and the "guano-mountains" of vile rubbish he has had to dig his way through. Many authors have met with as great difficulties in the execution of their task and have said less about it. One cannot but think that the virtue of silence, which Carlyle commends so highly in theory, might here have been put in practice with great advantage. Historians like Gibbon, Hume, and Robertson follow a different

plan. They do not lead out other historians to execution, as a preliminary sacrifice and in order to enhance their own merits. And they are rather at pains to conceal and keep in the background their laborious research, than push it prominently forward to public view. But such was not Carlyle's method.

It is in his *Frederick* more particularly that Carlyle's laborious preliminary investigation goes beyond all reasonable bounds. The reader has to wade through a dreary account of the Hohenzollerns as far back as they can be traced, aud the whole of the first and the greater part of the second volume must be perused before he obtains much more than casual glimpses of Frederick himself. In these investigations Carlyle exhibits much accurate research. But it is misplaced, and the thought will intrude that the author is more intent upon showing his own learning and the vast extent of his reading than upon describing the life and actions of his hero. These researches into the family history of remote ancestors shed but a feeble and uncertain light on their distinguished descendants, and when carried too far they are certain to become tedious. The earnest student may perhaps read them through and through with persistent effort; but to others it will prove an impossible task, and many a page will be turned over unread.

It has been observed as a characteristic feature of Carlyle's historical works that the author is fond of giving his readers a passing glimpse of individuals who lie outside the stream of events. Thus in his *Cromwell*, when describing the battle of Naseby, he brings in John Bunyan and John Dryden, though they took no part in that engagement, solely from the fact that the former was living at that time in the town of Leicester, not far from Naseby, and the latter was living in the same county where the battle was fought, "a lad of fourteen at present." In the same spirit, in his *French Revolution*, in that chapter headed "Procession," he introduces the monster Marat as looking on from some vantage ground while the deputies,—Mirabeau and the rest,—were walking past to their house of assembly. It is far from certain that Marat was there at all, but as a picturesque figure Carlyle includes him among the spectators and draws that remarkable portrait of him with which we are all familiar. In his *Frederick*, too, we have seen that he introduces the astronomer Kepler, who was living in a distant province far away from the scene of events and probably taking no interest in them, being far otherwise occupied. Whether this habit of introducing into his narrative remarkable persons in no way connected with the events described be a custom

more honoured in the breach than the observance may be left to the reader's judgment. At all events it is a peculiar feature of Carlyle's historical style, and furnishes fresh evidence, were such needed, of his wide range of reading.

An analogous peculiarity of Carlyle's historical method is found in his tendency to indulge very freely in philosophical reflections. Such observations, however interesting in themselves, will appear to most of us out of place in a historical work. Take that chapter of the *French Revolution* headed "Realized Ideals." Overweighted as it is with meditative thought, it has more than once prevented the reader from proceeding further with the book, being so different from what he looked for or expected to find written under the name of history. Take, again, that chapter headed "Contrat Social," which opens in the same style and is by no means easy reading to any one taking up the book to acquaint himself with the events of the French Revolution. On the whole it will be allowed that there is in Carlyle's histories too much of this laboured reflection, which by no means contributes to the *go* of the narrative. Let those who like history written in this way read Carlyle. But most readers will prefer in the historian of their choice the clear narrative of events,

uninterrupted by philosophical reflection and abstruse metaphysical speculation.

Certain other peculiarities may be observed which distinguish Carlyle from most other historians. Thus he is inclined to introduce the grotesque into many of his descriptions, in a way which seems rather out of place in a grave historical work. This is seen in the following passage in his *French Revolution.* When the news of the King's flight from Paris reaches Nantes at midnight by the diligence, Dumouriez, says Carlyle, on descending from his bedroom "finds the street covered with four or five thousand citizens in their shirts. Here and there a faint farthing rushlight, hastily kindled; and so many swart-featured, haggard faces with night caps pushed back; and the more or less flowing drapery of night shirt." At another town, when the news arrived, he says all men, official and non-official, "are hastily drawing on their breeches." All this may be very vivid and picturesque, but it is a new style for a historical work.

We see the same touch of the ludicrous and grotesque in some of the incidents which it is Carlyle's humour occasionally to introduce in his *Cromwell.* After giving a very minute and accurate description of the open country where the battle of Naseby was fought, showing

that he had personally visited it and examined the ground closely, he observes:—

"There are hollow spots, of a rank vegetation, scattered over the Broad Moor, which are understood to have once been burial *mounds*;—some of which, one to my knowledge, have been (with more or less of sacrilege) verified as such. A friend of mine has in his cabinet two ancient grinder-teeth, dug lately from that ground, —and waits for an opportunity to rebury them there. Sound effectual grinders, one of them very large; which ate their breakfast on the fourteenth morning of June two hundred years ago, and, except to be clenched once in grim battle, had never work to do more in this world!"

We also see a shade of the grotesque in his habit of introducing an imaginary character to express his own views with greater freedom than would be altogether becoming in himself. Thus in the earlier chapters of his *Cromwell*, he introduces a certain "impatient friend" to make comments and express the author's own views in a bolder and more grotesque manner than he could himself do in his own name. In like manner we find him quoting from a "modern commentator" and "modern critic," to express his own views under this disguise. All this, if somewhat striking, is also grotesque, and gives a rough unformed character to his method. It would surely be more artistic to work up the observations of these impatient friends and

modern commentators into the ordinary text, toning them down somewhat if need be.

Corresponding to these peculiarities it may be observed that Carlyle, when he gets hold of a striking phrase, has a way of repeating it again and again at due intervals. Thus in the *French Revolution* we have such phrases as "the gospel of Jean Jacques," "the sea-green man," repeated many times. When he gets hold of an epithet that fits a man he keeps at it. Such is this epithet of "sea-green" constantly applied to Robespierre; and many other examples might be culled from his writings. In his rough banter he does not even spare the fair sex. Having pointed out that Anne of Russia had a "big cheek," we have frequent allusions to it in such phrases as "she with the big cheek," "Czarina Anne with the big cheek." May we not consider this also as decidedly eccentric, and as quite a new style of writing history?

These may appear points of little moment. Let us pass on to another which can scarcely be so considered, and which, after truth of matter, touches most nearly the very substance and life of history. In Carlyle's historical works there is a want of coherence. There is no clear, closely connected, narrative of events. Carlyle appears to have had a difficulty in writing a consecutive history. It is known that he first tried to write

his *Cromwell* in this way, but had to give it up, finding he made no satisfactory progress. He therefore wrote it as we find it, in detached portions, loosely connected by abrupt comments and elucidations. It is much the same with his *French Revolution*, which is written in fragments and cannot be called a connected history. Instead of a clear narrative of events you have a series of *tableaux* or pictures. You sit down to read the book supposing it to be a history in the ordinary sense of the word, and are apt to be disappointed. What you miss is a continuous narrative,—a connected view of events in their sequence and order.

This *French Revolution* is a work of great power, wrung from the author's heart, as he himself confesses, in agony and torture. There are chapters in it of thrilling interest. The confusion of a general massacre, and the wild delirium of unrestrained human passion, no one describes so well as Carlyle. But what you will miss is the calm tone and clear connected narrative which we are accustomed to regard as essential features of a great historical work. It is more a poem than a history in the strict sense of the word. There is no continuous narrative. Groups of facts and events are brought forward, such as might present themselves to the mind of a poet. The author sees the prominent

characters and events passing before him as in a vision, and makes the reader see them too in that light.

Let us call it a drama, this *French Revolution*. We have before us in this work a kind of prose drama, now tragic and now comic, with many scenes of thrilling interest and passages of rare beauty, but wanting, as a whole, that finish, that unity and shapely form, which a great dramatist would have given to it. The events are not described historically, but are placed in groups, hints being dropped from time to time pointing to the final issue. The whole treatment of the subject is dramatic. You can imagine a great poet, at some future day, writing a magnificent drama of the French Revolution, and drawing invaluable hints from this work of Carlyle.

NOTES ON CARLYLE AS A GENERAL WRITER.

CHAPTER XXVII.

STYLE OF EXPRESSION—CARELESS STYLE—ABUSE OF COMPOUND WORDS—PROGRESS OF HIS STYLE—DEFICIENT IN LITERARY FORM.

As a writer Carlyle is in a peculiar degree unconventional. At times (for there are exceptions in abundance) he writes in a careless slovenly style, which would not be tolerated in a weaker writer. We tolerate it in Carlyle, and some of us are even disposed to admire it, because its strangeness is redeemed by other admirable qualities, because it is a picturesque and poetical style, and is so often the vehicle of weighty thought and excellent truth. It would seem as if, in despair of acquiring the clear sharp-cut style of Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, or Macaulay, and attracting attention by that means, he had determined to break loose from it and go to the opposite extreme. His style is that of "Herr Teufelsdröckh,"—rough and careless, after the fashion of

the old painter who, unable to succeed in any other way, dashed his brush against the canvas, if thereby he might paint *foam*.

From whatever cause arising, a careless style of expression is undoubtedly characteristic of Carlyle. He takes the readiest word, the word that comes uppermost. In some of his writings there are passages which look like rough notes written down in the most hurried manner, or as if intended only for his own private use, and conveying hints to be afterwards revised and put into a more shapely form. If we were to characterise his manner of writing on some, and these not rare occasions, we might call it the slap-dash style. There is sometimes found in his writings an audacity of expression perfectly alarming, where he uses the most uncouth words, and even the ordinary rules of grammar take flight before him.

Carlyle is the reverse of what you would call a *pernickety* writer. There is often found in his writings what is felt to be insufficient attention to the proprieties of composition. In his desire to be forcible, he writes wholly without ceremony. Classicism, the endeavour to bring to the front the beautiful in style, his soul abhorred. In some passages he reminds you of those artists who paint nature with an excess of realism, and are influenced by a strong tendency to obtrude

what is ugly and animalish. His style of writing, particularly in some of his later works, is in its character uncouth. He adopts from choice a certain clumsiness and ruggedness of expression, as much at variance with elegance in writing as a heavy slouching gait is at variance with one that is easy and graceful. He has no love for that French precision which combines clearness with neatness, but rather affects the characteristic clumsiness of German expression, and strives to transplant it into our language. His mind is cast in the German mould, not in the French. It is not German thought alone that he admires and copies. He imitates German modes of expression, and the neat precision and elegance of the French style is utterly distasteful to him. In his essay on *Richter* we can see how much he admired what is abrupt and robust in style, even to uncouthness. And yet, grace and unaffected elegance of expression, when will they cease to charm! They are indestructible; and when we cease to admire them, we must cease to be.

As Carlyle cared little for the polite amenities of life, so he cared little for the graces of style. Both appeared to him artificial and unreal. His manner of writing, like his manner of life, is earnest and vehement, not placid or graceful. He wished, above all, to express himself forcibly; and for this purpose he often blurts out his words

at random. His style, especially in his later writings, is a revolt against elegance. Instead of cultivating purity and grace of composition, he tramples them under his feet and prefers a style that is rough, abrupt, and disjointed. Many passages there are in his writings of great power, and where his language is vigorously picturesque, but, as a rule, ease and graceful elegance he has not.

Carlyle's contempt for the graces of style might be excusable, if to them must necessarily be sacrificed vigour of thought. But there is no such necessity. Do we not find correctness combined with great energy of thought in such writers as Swift, Hume, and Macaulay? Do we not find in the *Moral Sentiments* of Adam Smith, not to speak of his greater work, just reasoning and profound thought adorned with the most beautiful illustrations and with all the graces of style? Even in Addison, justly regarded as the purest and most graceful writer of English we have yet seen, there is no weak thought, nor is there in the prose any more than in the poetry of such fastidiously correct writers as Pope and Dryden.

Carlyle's violent style of expression was displeasing to his best friends. Jeffrey could not bear it. John Sterling remonstrated with him

about it; and his friendly biographer, Mr Froude, scarcely attempts to excuse it. As for Macaulay, though scarcely to be ranked among his friends, yet as a good judge, jealous of any violations of the purity of our language, he denounced it in the strongest terms. Carlyle himself at times had his misgivings. When engaged writing his *French Revolution* he jots down privately these words—"I think often I have mistaken my trade. That of style gives me great uneasiness. So many persons, almost everybody that speaks to me, object to my style as too full of meaning. Had it no other fault than that!" You do feel, whatever may be said to the contrary, that Carlyle would have done better if he had taken more pains with his style, and written under more self-restraint. At the same time, while it cannot be called a pure style, it appeals powerfully to the imagination. It is rugged, but expressive and suggestive. There is a poetic colouring in much that he wrote. In this respect he resembles Jeremy Taylor. A resemblance to the same writer may be traced in his impassioned bursts of eloquence, and in his involved style of expression. Speaking generally, Carlyle in his style resembles the prose writers of the Elizabethan age more than those of the age of Queen Anne. There is in his writings

careless power unfashioned by art. Along with the careless power and eloquence, he has also the diffuseness of writers of the Elizabethan age.

Carlyle appears to have desired not only to change our opinions of men and institutions, but to revolutionise our language as well. Some of the words he uses are such as were never heard of before. Some of them are extremely uncouth. Who but Carlyle would use such a word as "generalousness"?

Among his peculiarities of expression it may be observed that he uses the hyphen, to form new compound words, to a most unwarrantable extent. Some of his compound words, such as "cash-gospel," "life-wrestle," "light-beam," are very expressive. In such instances the use of the hyphen adds unmistakable force to the expression. If Carlyle had stopped at this point, no fault could have been found with him. But he goes farther, and frequently introduces the hyphen quite gratuitously and where nothing is gained either in the way of force or beauty. What, for instance, is gained by using such forms of expression as "put-out," "take-up"? What is gained by writing "well-weighed," "fly-wheel," "fifth-act," "forty-four"? It pleased Carlyle so to write them, without any obvious reason. In like manner, and if possible with even less reason,

he writes "good-sense," "word-of-command," "not-so-wise," "out-of-the-way." In such instances the hyphen appears to add absolutely nothing to the meaning. It merely mars the text and adds quite unnecessarily a fresh obstacle to the intelligent perusal of Carlyle's writings. Where the hyphen lends no force to the expression, most of us will be inclined to regard its introduction not only as superfluous but as a retrograde step in the development of the language. Many examples might be given of words now single being once written as compound words, with their component parts connected by the hyphen. But the language in its progress and as it became perfected has thrown off this connecting link. To restore it again, as Carlyle is so inclined to do, must be regarded as an attempt to reduce our language to its primitive rudeness, and as a step back to barbarism.

The same disposition to deviate from common usage and be a law unto himself in language is seen in his preference for the form "egoism," "egoist," "egoistic," instead of "egotism," "egotist," "egotistic." He seems to have overlooked the fact that what he regards as the superfluous *t* in such words was not originally introduced by caprice or accident, but for the sake of easy pronunciation. This way of writ-

ing them has fully established itself in the language, and, if somewhat faulty on the score of etymology, it has much to say for itself on the score of euphony. Nor is it a solitary instance in our language, and the same may be said of other languages, where something has been sacrificed to the laws of euphony.

Carlyle, it may be said, has two styles, an earlier and a later, which differ considerably from one another. In the *Essays* written at the commencement of his literary career, we find few peculiarities of expression. An original word, such as "halfness," crops out now and then, but that is all. In other respects the style is fastidiously correct. You read his essay on the poet Burns, and find it written, in point of style, as others might have written it. The same may be said of the *Lectures on Heroes*. Impressive they are and more fully informed with thought than we might expect to find, but we seek in vain for anything very peculiar in the form of expression. It is only when you come to his *Sartor*, his *French Revolution*, and his *Frederick*, that you find him deviating to any great extent from the beaten path, and adopting a style which may be considered unique among English writers.

Adverting again to his essay on Burns, we do not find any uncouthness there, or any remark-

able peculiarities of expression. From his full sympathy with the subject, Carlyle writes with his mind aglow, in a free open style, and with that faultless beauty which is natural in such cases where the feelings are warmly interested. The same may be said of the *Lectures on Heroes*. The style is spirited, clear, and simple. Having to address an audience seated before him, he may have been led to adopt a style more colloquial, concise, and spirited than usual. It is a good English style, free from any glaring violations of the proprieties of speech.

Afterwards he became more careless in his style, more slipshod, more indifferent to the ordinary rules of grammar and to that propriety of expression which is seen in our best writers almost without exception, and which has been handed down to us from classic times. This undue freedom, this want of what Macaulay calls filial respect for the language, is seen too often in his *French Revolution*, in his *Cromwell*, and in his *Frederick*.

There are indications in his writings that Carlyle adopted his later style of set purpose, in order thereby to attract attention and obtain a hearing. He thus succeeded in attracting attention, as a man might do who puts on a scarlet waistcoat. His earliest writings, however correc

were not written in a style that commended itself to ordinary readers. They were not written in the light sparkling style of Jeffrey, of Sydney Smith, or Macaulay. Ponderous and overweighted with thought, they were distasteful to the mob of readers. The prospect looked dreary, and the conviction was forced upon him that he never would, strive as he might, become a popular writer. Some new plan must be adopted, in order to elicit popular applause. Hence, perhaps, the vagaries and contortions of language which he cultivated and carried to excess in his *Sartor Resartus,* and more or less in the writings that followed it.

Carlyle's style of expression, that into which he fell more particularly in his later writings, may fairly be considered a vicious style. It is perhaps enough to condemn it to say that he has found no imitators. Notwithstanding the widespread popularity of some of his works, though he has succeeded by his earnestness and devotion to truth, and by his imaginative and poetic language, in awakening the sympathies of many readers, yet none of them, not even the most ardent of his admirers, have adopted his peculiar style of expression. Among those who sat at the feet of Carlyle and looked up to him with the greatest reverence must be placed in front rank John Sterling and Mr Froudè;

and yet, with all their admiration of him as a wise teacher, neither of them ventured to imitate his style.

If, apart from his style of expression, we look at his literary method, there will be observed a want of artistic form in most of Carlyle's works. They are not complete in themselves. There is a want of finish. Take his *Past and Present*. It has many fine passages, but, considered as a whole, it is disjointed and without arrangement. There is a want of proportion, a want of unity and consecutive thought. The author takes up one subject and then flies off to another, and the mind of the reader is distracted by conflicting ideas.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MERITS AS A WRITER—HIS ORIGINALITY.

CARLYLE is usually considered, and is in fact, one of the most original writers of the nineteenth century. This is true not only of his style of expression, but in other respects also. His thoughts wander over a wide range, and in many of them he is highly original. The same may be said of his method and mode of spreading out his ideas before the reader. We might go over his works, one by one, and find some features of originality in them all. His *Sartor* is the most original of his works, so far as conception and method, and even expression, are concerned. It goes without saying that the *French Revolution* is a highly original book, written as no history ever was written before. The noble *Lectures on Heroes* bear throughout the stamp of originality. Even in his earliest writings, comprising his literary and biographical essays, it is plain that he does not follow the footsteps of other writers, but hews out a road for himself, expressing his own independent thought as the result of personal study.

And if we turn from any one of his works as a whole to particular ideas, we shall still find the same stamp of originality. The idea of "hero-worship," on which he speaks so copiously, may be considered original, in the sense that no one has ever unfolded it so fully before. Nowhere will you find the good that lies hid in hero-worship described with greater depth and penetration. No one brings out so well the undoubted truth that there lies deep in the heart of man, in the very centre of his being, an indestructible reverence for great men, and that this principle plays a great part in the scheme of Providence, and is of incalculable benefit in binding society together. In the same rank may be placed what he says of symbols, of the importance of studying reality in the fine arts, of poetry, and of humour. On all these themes he discourses with an originality that cannot be surpassed.

No one was ever more impressed than Carlyle with the fact, or saw it with clearer vision, that a singular mystery lies at the root of everything, that in every object we look at there is something we cannot comprehend, which is hidden from our view by a veil which no man can withdraw. He was well acquainted with science. He had even studied it deeply, and could
as well as any one the "vast strides" wh

been made of late years in the interpretation of nature. Yet not the less, but rather the more, did the vast volume of what we know not unroll itself before his eyes. On this subject, too, his views bear the stamp of originality.

Again, it would be difficult to find anywhere a clearer refutation of the doctrine that men in their conduct are in the main influenced by material motives or by mere considerations of profit and loss. He contends, on the contrary, that the checks and balances of profit and loss have never been the chief forces that moved men. Look, for example, at the Crusades. The visible object was worth nothing. It was the boundless invisible idea rearing itself in the imagination that stirred the hearts of men, and moved them to action. And so, in innumerable cases, and in all great emergencies, it is not the visible, tangible object, but some "invisible, mystic, and ideal aim," appealing to the imagination, which lays hold of the hearts of men, and animates them to heroic endurance and self-sacrifice. Carlyle's thoughts on this theme are certainly impressive, and to most of us they will appear profound and original.

Were we to name another subject on which Carlyle speaks with force and originality, we might point to his observations on the weakness of the understanding in certain cases. Truths

there are which we discover by means of intuition, and upon which reason sheds but a glimmering light. Such is that great fact, the existence of God. It is, he says, not discoverable by reason but by the higher light of intuition, known for long under the name of faith. If in the works of creation we find new evidence of a designing Maker, so far well; but the clearer evidence lies nearer home,—inwardly in our own souls. And so it is with many other truths, which mere reason and logic are wholly unable to reach or comprehend.

When all this is said of Carlyle's originality, it may also be admitted that he borrowed much from others. Nor need this derogate from his fame; for the defect, if it be a defect, he only shares with our greatest writers, all of whom have been much indebted to those who wrote before them.

Carlyle was familiar with the spirit and letter of the sacred Scriptures, and many of his grandest and most impressive thoughts, and sometimes the very language in which they are expressed, were derived plainly from that source. That God takes an active share in the affairs of men, which is so prominent a feature of Carlyle's teaching, what is it but the old Hebrew belief? So far from being a new doctrine, it is as old as the hills, and is set forth with greater fulness in

the Bible than anywhere else. Carlyle's merit consists, not in the discovery of a new truth, but in preaching it with new fervour. Then, as to his moral ideas, they are in complete harmony with the teachings of Christianity. All that he says about truth and sincerity, what is it but an echo of what is there taught? His detestation of cant and of shams, what is it but a new version of Christ's own words? All that he says about loyalty to duty, the obligation laid upon us to do our daily task as in the sight of God, is a purely Christian idea. In short, if we were to take from Carlyle all that he borrowed, consciously or unconsciously, from the sacred Scriptures, he would be shorn of much of his strength, of much that makes him attractive and powerful as a writer. Those old Bible truths he brings before us in a new garb. Clothed in his figurative style, and stamped with his strong convictions, they shine with the splendour of new gold.

Another source from which Carlyle drew inspiration may be traced to the great writers of Germany. At that spring he drank deep. His literary criticisms took their tone from such writers as Lessing and Goethe and the Schlegels. In philosophy he learnt much from Emanuel Kant. His sublime thoughts on the "divine idea of the world" are confessedly a version of Fichte's views on that theme. Indeed,

so saturated was Carlyle with German ideas, that he has been described as "a Scottish sapling grafted upon German thought."

Needless it were to say how much Carlyle was indebted to our own great writers, particularly to Shakespeare and Bacon. Many are the hints he derived from both. Who, for example, does not perceive a close resemblance between the state of mind of Herr Teufelsdröckh, before he emerged from darkness to light, and that of young Hamlet when it went so heavily with his disposition? Nor can we fail to trace in many of his ideas a close likenss to those found in the *Essays*, the *Advancement of Learning*, and the *Novum Organum* of Bacon.

Carlyle, like many writers of undoubted originality, such as Lord Bacon himself, has certain favourite ideas which he is never tired of repeating over and over again. Notes are heard in his earliest writings which are prolonged through all his works. As an illustration of this, take that favourite idea of his that to the primitive man "there was nothing not divine." We find it in *Sartor*, in the *Lectures on Heroes*, and again we find it repeated with emphasis in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. In like manner, we find the same questions discussed in more than one of his works. In *Sartor* lies the germ of much of his teaching on social subjects. His thoughts on

the "nigger question," which offended so many, are first found there, and also his indignant protest against the celebrated doctrine of Malthus on early marriages and over-population. A remarkable coincidence may be observed between the social and political views set forth in *Past and Present* and those found in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. In his *Essays* we have foreshadowings of his *Lectures on Heroes*, and in the latter we have foreshadowings of opinions more fully developed in some of his other works,—as, for example, in the estimate he forms of Cromwell. There is thus a coherence and continuity of thought running through his writings. Certain ideas and certain favourite questions have taken such a hold of him, and so impressed his mind, that he cannot help reproducing them. This repetition of the same thoughts on many various occasions does not indicate poverty of intellect. It only shows that such thoughts were deeply rooted in his mind, so that he could not shake them off, and may be taken rather as a proof of originality than otherwise.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HIS MERITS AS A WRITER—WISE LESSONS—HIS RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE.

MANY of the lessons that Carlyle taught are wise lessons. Look, for example, how earnestly he inculcates obedience to the law of duty! His eloquent words on this theme have borne fruit, as many can testify. Observe, again, his assaults on mammonism, where, in burning language, he denounces the folly of sacrificing everything to the vulgar ambition of making money and becoming rich at all hazards. His teaching here is good and wholesome, and his words have the ring of truth in them. He takes his stand very decidedly against the pursuit of material interests as the chief end of man. In glowing language he dwells upon the fact that it is not by a regard for material and selfish interests that we are animated to self-sacrifice. Far different are the motives which stir the heart to its foundations and make us gladly submit to pain and suffering. Great was Carlyle's reverence for the spiritual in man's nature, for those hopes and fears and un-

fathomable instincts that thrill our being, and exercise such a powerful influence over us. He had a clear view of the vast influence exercised by such sentiments as loyalty, patriotism, reverence, and of the important part they play in life. In his view even our prejudices have a truth and value in them which we do well not to overlook. In these days of the boasted march of intellect, he calls us back with great wealth of illustration to the vast unexplored region of the "Unknown," pointing out how there are mysteries lying unexplained on every side. This, too, is a wise lesson which we in this age need to be taught.

Observe, again, how wisely Carlyle speaks on some of the more practical duties. One of his favourite maxims is that happiness is to be found in work—useful work. On this theme he enlarges at great length, and he recurs to it again and again, looking at it in a great variety of lights. Among other advantages, he points to the mysterious comfort "fire-proof employments" yield in the darkest hours of affliction, by withdrawing our attention from ourselves. Another of his useful practical rules is, that we should do the duty that lies nearest us. In one place he says, "Do thy Duty. What Duty, do you ask? The Duty that lies nearest thee." In another place he says, "Do the first thing that comes to your

hand; do it; the second will already have become clearer, doabler."

Much of Carlyle's influence was due to the religious tone running through his earlier writings. His disciples looked up to him as the founder of a new school of thought, almost as the founder of a new religion. For young and ardent minds, ever alive to what is noble and true, his high spiritual teaching had an inexpressible charm. No wonder if their hearts burnt within them as he talked of these things, exalting the importance of faith, denouncing the folly of scepticism, preaching truth and sincerity in heart and life, upholding spiritual aims as in harmony with our higher nature, and steadfastly inculcating the lesson of loyalty to duty.

Carlyle presents himself as a teacher of wisdom—as having a message of incalculable importance to deliver for the behoof of mankind. He stands forth as a prophet or preacher, denouncing the vain idols to which men bow down, and recalling them back to the true worship. The false idols of untruth and of shams of every description he boldly denounces, and preaches with all the sincerity of earnest conviction the great doctrine of belief in God and in His providence. Is it wonderful that in the full flush of such teaching, imparted in passionate and

poetical tones, the hearts of many were stirred within them!

It was to the young especially that his words were welcome. When he visited London in 1831 we learn that he found more encouragement from the rising young men than from others. Those of an intellectual turn, earnestly bent upon acting their part in life worthily, were already beginning to look up to him as their teacher. From this time onward, we read, for the space of ten years or so, young men of serious minds began to correspond with him, thanking him for the truths he taught and for the great things he had done for them. It is probably still among the comparatively young that we find his warmest admirers. But others also, of maturer years, gladly heard his voice. To those who were oppressed with the prevailing materialism, oppressed by the thought that nothing existed but what was demonstrable, his words inspired hope. Among the letters he received was one, "welcome if ill-spelt," from a poor Paisley weaver, thanking him for having taught him that "man does not live by demonstration, but by faith. The world had been to him for a long time a deserted temple. Carlyle's writings had restored the significance of things to him, and his voice had been as the voice of a beneficent spiritual father."[1]

[1] See Froude's *Life of Carlyle.*

Some maintain that Carlyle's moroseness, cynicism, and discontent detract much from the value of his high-toned religious teaching. This may well be doubted; for if his character had some features which we are compelled to mourn over, it possessed other qualities which all must admire, and which in him reached a point of perfection which the best among us might strive in vain to imitate. With all his failings, we may safely say that Carlyle was a religious teacher of great power, whose influence has been felt far and wide, and which will endure. His teaching has brought light and comfort to many earnest souls. What does Mr Froude, his affectionate biographer, say of its influence upon himself? These are his words: "I was saved by his writings from Positivism, Romanism, or Atheism. Carlyle taught me a creed which I could then accept as really true; which I have held ever since with increasing confidence as the interpretation of my existence and the guide of my conduct, so far as I have been able to act up to it. Then, and always, I looked and have looked to him as my master. In a long personal intimacy of over thirty years I learnt to reverence the man as profoundly as I honoured the teacher."

CHAPTER XXX.

HIS MERITS AS A WRITER—GENERAL REMARKS—WROTE FOR THE AGE—HIS MOROSENESS MODIFIED BY CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES—CONCLUDING NOTE.

ONE thing that strikes us in Carlyle, and which points him out as a remarkable writer, is that on reading his works we find much substance in them. Every now and then we meet with something that strongly arrests our attention and makes us think. There is a great deal of thought in Carlyle,—often clear and practical thought. After every deduction has been made a great body of truth remains in his writings, rolled out in an impulsive manner here and there, and at times blazing up very brightly. If somewhat cumbrous now and then, he moves with massive force,—moves, as he himself would have expressed it, not with a part, but with his whole mind.

Carlyle is a unique figure in our literature. He stamps his style with his own individuality, which was that of a robust and rugged nature. If we were to describe him in one word, we would say he is a robust writer. There is no

maudlin sentimentality to be met with in all his writings. Grotesqueness there is, but no weakness. It is much in these days to find a man of vigorous mind giving utterance to his real thoughts without fear or favour. Prejudiced Carlyle may be, but he is always sincere and always in earnest. There is a rugged force in his writings that carries everything before it.

Carlyle appears to us in the light of an earnest teacher, who brings the whole force of his mind to bear on the subjects discussed. His earnestness helps him much. There is a certain weight of character in some writers which has a great effect. This weight of character Carlyle possesses, derived from the earnestness with which he writes. He has a certain earnest, downright, blunt way of speaking, which gives impressiveness to his words irrespective of their truth. This earnestness, this strength of conviction, communicates itself to his readers, and exercises a magnetic influence over them. It is contagious, and convinces us against our will. Is it to this earnestness Emerson refers when he says of Carlyle that "he has manly superiority rather than intellectuality," and that in his writings "there is more character than intellect in every sentence"?

Carlyle's is a natural style. It may be called natural, not only because his words come fresh

and unstudied from the heart, and are the outpourings of one who says to conventional rules of writing, begone! but also because in his variety and abrupt contrasts he may be said to copy external nature. Nothing is more characteristic of nature than its endless variety and diversity. It never wearies by tame uniformity, but is ever changing. It is confined to no one type, but embraces all types. In Carlyle's writings we are reminded of this diversity. In his abrupt transitions he passes quickly from one train of thought and from one type of style to another. His mood is irregular, and many of his finer thoughts come upon us unexpectedly, like sunbursts from a cloudy sky. In this, if there be something to startle, there is also something to please, for our minds by habit are attuned to such changes.

As a writer, Carlyle may be considered remarkable in this, that he threw himself heart and soul into the prevailing ideas and problems of the age. He spoke out in a "goustrous" manner thoughts which were seething in the minds of many. The social problems of the day he discussed with passionate fervour. There is much false science in his writings, much false philosophy, much false political economy; but over it all is thrown the halo of imagination and warm feeling, which sets the heart of the reader aglow.

It is a common belief, which Carlyle shared, that the sceptical tone of literature and philosophy, and the negation of religion throughout Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century, by inclining men to sigh and weep, to feel how flat, stale, and unprofitable were all the uses of this world, paved the way for the *Sorrows of Werter*, which gave expression to feelings seething at the time in many minds. In like manner we may say that the weariness of conventional forms, of pretence, of cant, about the time when Carlyle wrote paved the way in some measure for his writings, and inclined the minds of many to welcome his vigorous assaults upon them. On these subjects the doctrines he preached were such as the age desired to hear, and were expressed in a style which the age could understand.

May we not say, too, that the rough and careless style in which it pleases Carlyle to write may be regarded as, in some measure, the expression of the times in which we live. Scarcely any one now cultivates studied dignity and elegance of style such as was common not so many years ago. If any one does so, he speaks a language which is out of date and which is not appreciated. There is now a nearer approach to nature and direct feeling in our modes of expression, as there is greater plainness in our manners and dress.

What may be called a more business style has taken the place of what was once so fashionable. In the carelessness of his language Carlyle wrote, we may say, for the age in which he lived, and in a style suited to the manners of the period. It would not have been possible to write thus, so as to be appreciated, in the age of Queen Anne. There is something, it might almost be said, in Carlyle's style in harmony with this age of railways and steamboats. It is a great rough style, with gleams of truth flashing through it. When everything is moving at railway speed, a looser and more rapid style, which would not have been tolerated in bygone times, is tolerated and applauded now.

To say that Carlyle had a well-balanced mind, and that he formed a correct judgment on every topic to which he turned his attention, would be a gross mistake. He was by no means infallible. His judgment was often warped by prejudice, which distorted his vision and led him into error. It is no wonder if his glorification of the past over the present, his disposition to elevate certain individuals of questionable character, such as Mirabeau and Rousseau, to the rank of true heroes, his adoration of might and brute force in men, irrespective of the milder virtues, his ringing the changes on "sham" [illegible] to think he is himself a [illegible] critic-

cism, and in some instances given rise to a wild spirit of retaliation.

On one point, where he has incurred censure, it may be observed that Carlyle's moroseness, as it arose in part from peculiar accidents in his lot, so it was very much modified by a change in these. "Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis." His assaults on mammonism were toned down and lost much of their asperity when he himself became a rich man. With the improvement in his worldly affairs he began to take a more lenient view of the amenities and amiabilities of life, and became not altogether averse to mingle in aristocratic circles. In 1844 we find him on a visit to the Barings at their villa in the country, where he met a congenial party. He had then surmounted his earlier difficulties and was in easy circumstances, with the prospect of affluence. Writing to his wife on this occasion, he says, "The whole matter went off with effect. It is really interesting to me to be a part of such a company now and then. Their art in speech, more and more noticeable gradually, is decidedly a thing to be considered valuable, venerable. Real good breeding, as the people have it here, is one of the finest things now going in the world. The careful avoidance of all discussion, the swift hopping from topic to topic, does not agree with me; but the graceful skill

they do it with is beyond that of minuets." He would not have spoken so amiably ten or fifteen years previously. There has been a considerable advance since then. He is evidently getting rid of his bearishness, and begins to appreciate the charm of polite society.

What may be the ultimate verdict on Carlyle as a writer it would be hard to say. When we consider how many in our own language, who were considered in their day writers of surpassing merit, have since then passed into oblivion and are now never read, we may some of us fear that a like fate awaits Carlyle. Even in the times immediately preceding our own there have been authors, speaking merely of those who wrote in prose, highly distinguished in their own day who are now almost forgotten. We can some of us remember the time when Henry Brougham was greatly admired, not as an orator alone, but as a writer. And yet, where is he now? Fallen from his high estate to the common level, and now placed probably as far below his just position as his admiring contemporaries placed him above it. And yet, while admitting that Carlyle never will be a popular author, in the sense of being read by all classes and regarded as a national heritage by all, I cannot but hope that a select few will continue to cherish his memory as one of our most illustr[illegible] ran

so counter to many of the most cherished opinions and customs of society that no one can wonder at the resistance he meets with and the antipathy of many towards him. Nevertheless, his vehement assaults on "cant" and "shams" and "mammonism" have borne, and will continue to bear, good fruit. We may hope that he has frightened these monsters, if he did not succeed in killing them outright.

Let nothing that has been said anywhere in these pages be allowed to detract in the least from Carlyle's greatness as a writer, or from the debt we owe him for the many noble lessons with which his writings abound. He has acquitted himself well, and accomplished great things. Much of his teaching is good and wholesome, and suited to the times. The doctrines he preached were many of them such as the age required to hear, and by which it has been made better. Were there no other merit to which he could lay claim, yet there would remain this, that the tendency of his writings is to draw men more closely together in the bonds of brotherhood and mutual helpfulness. All honour to him for what he has done and striven to do in this direction!

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